

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. Members:** No.

## ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

### THE CONSTITUTION

#### PROPOSED RESOLUTION—SUGGESTED THREAT TO CANADIAN AND NATIVE RIGHTS

**Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher):** Madam Speaker, I was going to direct my question to the Right Hon. Prime Minister, but—

**An hon. Member:** He has gone west.

**Mr. Munro (Hamilton East):** You asked him to go, Jake.

**Mr. Epp:** Madam Speaker, he has just left, perhaps because of petulance, but if he does go west, we guarantee him a very warm reception.

● (1415)

Therefore, I should like to direct my question to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The Right Hon. Louis St. Laurent, on November 9, 1951, speaking at McGill University, stated that:

Canadians will believe that all their cherished rights are completely safe against the encroachment of any possible majority of their fellow citizens.

The late Right Hon. Lester Pearson, in debating the UN Declaration of Human Rights, expressed very similar views and made the point that the majority could not use its power to enact legislation or remove rights against the minority. In view of the fact that these former Liberal prime ministers have rejected unilateral action in the past, could the minister outline how the unilateral action of the government through amendments to the BNA Act in the proposed joint resolution does not threaten both Canadian rights and native Canadian rights?

**Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):** Madam Speaker, the hon. member is probably well aware of section 24 which indicates that in no way can the joint resolution be interpreted to detract or deduct anything from the rights that the native people have. Second, he must be aware that the National Indian Brotherhood and other native organizations will be invited to come before the joint committee this week. I believe the Inuit are going to be there this evening—that is my information—and the Brotherhood perhaps tomorrow, or very soon. But so far as I am aware, there is no question that the joint committee and the steering committee wish to have the native organizations before them.

They will have ample opportunity to present their views at that time not only to government members of that committee

### Oral Questions

but to opposition members. I believe the hon. member himself is on that committee. All members of the committee will have an opportunity to hear what the native organizations have to say and to take a position on what should be done with respect to the entrenchment of their rights in the constitution. So not only will government members have to take a position but certainly the hon. member and his party will have to take one too. That assures me, and it should assure the hon. member, that they will have full input into the constitution with respect to expressing their views and getting involvement from elected members of Parliament.

**Mr. Epp:** My supplementary question is directed to the same minister. The minister knows that that answer is not adequate. It is not adequate because the Indian leadership has said very clearly that they have not been consulted. In fact, in a speech on April 29 of this year, the Prime Minister, when he appeared before the Indian Chiefs and Elders in this city, said:

We want to work closely with you in reforming the Canadian Constitution in ways which will better secure the rights and the status of the original people of this land.

The minister knows that the appearance of the NIB and other Indian groups before the joint committee is done almost under duress because the government has been blocking every attempt for a proper hearing in that committee as well. So I should like to ask the minister whether he would outline very clearly, not what the constitutional committee is doing, but what specific steps the government has taken since last April 29 to involve the Indian people in constitutional change, and will he specify which ones were accepted by the Indian people as having been taken in close consultation?

**Mr. Munro (Hamilton East):** First, Madam Speaker, may I indicate to the hon. member that it is not correct and I do not accept—and I ask all hon. members not to accept—that the government is blocking the attempts of the NIB to have their views expressed before the joint committee. This is a matter for all members of the joint committee and of the steering committee to decide and I understand that the Indian groups will be heard.

So far as the substance of the hon. member's question is concerned, there has been a series of meetings since the Prime Minister's statement in April, referred to by the hon. member, showing his concern and his commitment to involve the Indian people in the constitutional discussions relative to questions that are of primary concern to them. There have been meetings between myself and the Indian leadership off and on for a protracted period of time for the last several months. The National Indian Brotherhood and other native organizations have met with my colleague, the Minister of Justice, leading to the first ministers' conference on the constitution. They had a meeting then to discuss their concerns. There have been other meetings at the official level with federal-provincial officials, several of them with native organizations. If the hon. member does not consider all those meetings—and I think they were a worth-while exchange of views—a real attempt to indulge in consultation, I do not know what the hon. member would consider a real attempt.