

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

## GOVERNMENT POSITION

**Mr. Raymond Garneau (Laval-des-Rapides):** Mr. Speaker, my question was not loaded. It was quite straightforward, and isn't the Government always forcing the Opposition to take a stand on various issues? It is now two and a half years since this Government came to power, and we have yet to receive any information on the Conservative Government's position on the issue of Quebec and the Constitution. When is it going to make its position clear?

[English]

**Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, unlike the previous Government which acted unilaterally on these kinds of issues, these discussions are continuing. When a decision is taken on this, hopefully it will find favour with the Government of the Province of Quebec. And it will be announced in the appropriate manner.

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## ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

## DISCUSSIONS AT FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

**Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River):** Mr. Speaker, given the paramount importance to the aboriginal people of Canada of the recognition of their inherent right to self-government, and the difficulties that the Minister of Justice knows have been encountered in the preliminary talks, will the Minister of Justice advise the House if the Prime Minister will take the opportunity of his meeting with the Premiers tonight to impress upon them the importance to aboriginal people and all Canadians of reaching agreement at the First Ministers' conference?

**Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Hon. Member's question because I share with him his position on the importance of having an agreement between the aboriginal peoples, the provinces, and the federal Government at the First Ministers' meeting to be held at the end of this month. I believe it is fair to say that the federal Government has taken leadership in trying to arrive at an agreement to recognize the right to self-government of the native peoples of our country and articulate that on the basis of negotiated agreements. Recent public opinion polls have indicated that the vast majority of Canadians want a system by which these self-government arrangements are negotiated. That is a position shared by the aboriginal people of Canada.

## GOVERNMENT POSITION

**Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River):** Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Justice. Does the federal Government accept, and will it indeed

promote and endorse the concept that the right to self-government of aboriginal peoples is not something that is just dependent on the consent and agreement of the federal and provincial Governments, but derives from their status under the treaties that their forefathers made?

**Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the First Ministers' meetings and the preliminary meetings that have taken place until now is to define aboriginal rights in the Constitution. We are dealing in a constitutional context. The Hon. Member will understand that it is absolutely essential in this process that we have the federal Government and seven provinces representing 50 per cent of the population to attain constitutional change.

**Mr. Riis:** What is your position?

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** We have articulated our position over and over again. We have given leadership. As a matter of fact, a very distinguished journalist, Mr. Peter Trueman, stated recently: "Few Canadian Prime Ministers have so strongly supported aboriginal rights or worked so hard for them". Our Government's record is clear.

## GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

**Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice is very long on generalities, and I agree with them, but is very short on specifics. What exactly is the Government doing besides letting Ministers say that it will be too expensive?

● (1430)

**Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada):** Mr. Speaker, I think that is a very unfair statement on the part of the Hon. Member. There is no question that we have put in countless hours. We have had bilateral meetings. The Prime Minister has met bilaterally. We have had an opportunity to meet with our provincial counterparts. We have had officials' meetings going on and on. We have been tireless in our desire to give the leadership which will result in an amendment to our Constitution. That is something for which I hope I will have the support of the Hon. Member and his Party and, indeed, of all Members of the House of Commons.

## ROLE OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

**Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice on the same subject. Mr. George Erasmus, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, has charged, regarding plans for the forthcoming First Ministers' conference, that the federal Government is not playing a leadership role. He said: "In former years, the federal Government was a major ally of the native people. Now we have some of the provinces taking a lead". Can the Minister of Justice explain to the House, and to the country, why he and his Government are being so wishy-washy