

Oral Questions

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—REQUEST FOR AMENDMENT

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I find it difficult to understand why the issue of aboriginal self-government would have in any way impeded a constitutional accord.

Will the Prime Minister agree to ask his provincial counterparts to review and amend the Accord to reinstate, at the top of the agenda, the issue of aboriginal rights and self-government at all future constitutional conferences until the issue is disposed of, recognizing the inherent constitutional rights of our native people?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think it would be evident to anyone concerned about the well-being of the aboriginal peoples that one of the principal reasons for Canada's failure in this regard at federal-provincial conferences was the fact that Quebec was not part of that process. It is my judgment that had Quebec been there the results in 1985 and 1987 would have been clearly different.

One of the great benefits of the Meech Lake Accord, once it is completed and with Quebec at the table, will be to put the partners of Canada in a much better position to ensure that the aboriginal peoples finally secure that degree of justice to which they are entitled. That is another very important reason why I hope all Members will support the Meech Lake Accord.

[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES—PROMOTION OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL AUTONOMY—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to understand how recognizing and putting back on the agenda the rights of our native people can threaten the Constitutional Accord. The native people cannot wait indefinitely.

Since the Prime Minister will be meeting the premiers in the coming weeks, could he not ask them to take this opportunity to promote native self-government and to provide our native people with the territory and the resources required to give real meaning to this initiative?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, for my part, the rights of the native people are still on the agenda. They have never been excluded from this agenda, despite the fact that we did not succeed at the last federal-provincial conference in meeting the basic requirements of the native people. One of the major reasons for this was the exclusion of Quebec in 1981. Quebec had a very impressive record as far as protecting the rights of the native people, but it was excluded from the constitutional process. One of the major components of the Meech Lake Accord would be to have Quebec rejoin the constitutional family, and its presence at the constitutional table would have a very positive impact on the future of the Canadian native people and their basic rights.

I therefore believe that even though I have stated publicly that, for my part and for the Government, the issue of our

native people remains on the agenda, we have a better chance of succeeding in meeting our fundamental objective if Quebec sits at the constitutional table.

• (1420)

[*English*]

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM—SCHEDULING AND MECHANISM

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Prime Minister. As the Prime Minister knows, the aboriginal leaders of Canada have called for a renewed constitutional process. That process is to deal with treaty and aboriginal rights. The Pope, when he was in Fort Simpson, was very supportive of this demand. I want to add my gratitude to His Holiness for keeping his promise to return to Fort Simpson and for calling for dignity and equity for Canada's aboriginal peoples.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Penner: Is the Prime Minister prepared now to take steps immediately to develop, along with the aboriginal leaders, a schedule and a mechanism for completing the unfinished business of aboriginal constitutional reform? I am not asking for vague generalizations from the Prime Minister, but am asking for something very specific, that a schedule and mechanism be put in place immediately.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my intention to complete the unfinished business in regard to native peoples, who were left in a situation of neglect for more years than this country should even bear to mention, begins today with the tabling of the Meech Lake report. Its conclusion will provide for Quebec's return to the Constitution and that will have a very important beneficial effect on the capacity of Canada to deal fairly with the native peoples, as it ought to have dealt with them. I have made it very clear that my objective and the objective of my Government is that degree of justice for native peoples.

It happens that we inherited a situation which almost precluded that objective. Parliament is now in the process of redressing this injustice. I am satisfied that given Quebec's quite impressive record over many decades in dealing with its own native peoples, its presence at the constitutional table as a full partner will have a most beneficial effect in favour of justice on behalf of the native people.

FUNDING OF ABORIGINAL ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Keith Penner (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, let me try another specific question. The Prime Minister knows that funding to enable aboriginal organizations to pursue constitutional reform has been cut. Aboriginal leaders have called for a restoration of those moneys. Today the Constitutional Committee, which tabled its report, supports that request. Is the Prime Minister now prepared to restore this funding so that preparatory work for successful constitutional negotiations for aboriginal people may continue? Is he