

Oral Questions

the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Government of Canada would prefer a charter to patriation?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, we have not been faced with that choice, and we do not expect to be.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Since the Secretary of State for External Affairs gave a representation on behalf of cabinet, and on behalf of Canada, which was not supported by his government, has the Government of Canada sought a means, since that time, to indicate that the Secretary of State for External Affairs was speaking something other than the view of the Government of Canada when he made that representation?

Mr. MacGuigan: Madam Speaker, at the time I spoke I was involved in active discussion. My expression was rhetorical, and well known to be such.

Some hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Nielsen: Tongue in cheek!

Mr. MacGuigan: The purpose of my comment was to indicate how devoted the cabinet and this side of the House are to the charter of rights.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, we now have the Secretary of State for External Affairs admitting the accuracy of the quotations in the minutes which were a record of his conversation of December 19. These are minutes which have been published, which he has seen, which he has indicated, in one particular, were cast not as reflecting the government's view but as reflecting only his own view. We have heard before that some of the positions uttered by the Government of Canada and on the public record were less than candid, tongue in cheek, or rhetorical. Will the Secretary of State for External Affairs, knowing that the people of Canada are interested in knowing the whole truth about the government's position on this matter, issue an edited version of those statements indicating which are rhetorical, which are tongue in cheek, which are less than candid, and which few are the truth?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacGuigan: Madam Speaker, I believe I detect some rhetoric on their side as well.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacGuigan: As we have said repeatedly, Madam Speaker, we have no intention of publishing the minutes of those meetings. One cannot draw any conclusion with respect to the whole minutes from the excerpts which the hon. gentle-

man claims I have now confirmed. The fact is, that does not lead to any conclusions about the rest of the minutes.

● (1420)

DETAILS OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION BETWEEN CANADIAN AND BRITISH HOUSE LEADERS

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Secretary of State for External Affairs, who in exchanges in the House, both on October 31, 1980, and November 3, 1980, advised the House that he was fully aware of all the details of a telephone conversation between the then British House leader and his own government House leader. Was this the first time when the minister was made aware of the difficulties which the British government felt it would encounter with the constitutional proposals, or is it his contention that he was not advised of these problems until his meeting on November 10, 1980, with the then British House leader, Mr. Stevas?

Hon. Mark MacGuigan (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Madam Speaker, the British government made it clear in the first conversation I had with them that there were difficulties in the way. They also made it clear that, despite those difficulties, they would do what they were required to do by convention.

Miss MacDonald: Madam Speaker, to follow up on the question of what was actually told to the minister, following the November 10 meeting in London, the Secretary of State for External Affairs told the news media, according to a CP wire story, that when this matter was discussed the only possible problem was "one of timing". However, the Canadian government telex report on that November 10 meeting noted that the British House leader clearly stated to the minister that passage at Westminster would be dependent on how soon the measure reaches London and what it contained. Which of these two reports is being given tongue-in-cheek or which one is being stated as rhetorical? Can the minister tell us which of these two versions is the truth?

Mr. MacGuigan: Madam Speaker, as we have stated many times, the spokesmen of the British government have frequently referred to the difficulties they will encounter as to how soon they can pass our resolution through their House. Obviously there are some difficulties with respect to some members of their backbench. For the British government it is a question of when this resolution can be brought forward in the House, and, therefore, a question of timing.

Miss MacDonald: Madam Speaker, my final supplementary question comes back to the question which I have already asked. Why is the minister afraid of telling which of these two versions that have been presented is the true one?

Mr. MacGuigan: Madam Speaker, I am not afraid of anything that has gone on the record.

Miss MacDonald: Except the truth.