

As a result of a lunch which I was hosting this afternoon, I escorted my guest to the Speaker's Gallery of the House of Commons where I tarried for half an hour during Question Period before coming over here. In response to questions from the Leader of the Official Opposition on this question of process within the Parliament of Canada, the Prime Minister, as I heard him in the other place, was quite specific in not saying directly that it would be referred to a committee of the House of Commons or a joint committee; he simply said that the usual parliamentary process would follow, and that the Deputy Prime Minister and government house leader would consult with his opposite numbers in the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party to decide on that process.

That seems to be a somewhat more reticent answer to this question than the very forthcoming answer given by the Leader of the Government in the Senate to the effect that, indeed, it has been decided by the government that there will be a joint committee. I wonder which version I should accept.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, I trust I have not missed any signals from the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister, and I trust that no conversation I have had in recent days with the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have been overtaken by events. That is altogether possible. However, I must say that on the basis of my discussions, it was the intention of the government to propose the creation of a joint committee of this place and the other place to study these texts.

1987 CONSTITUTIONAL ACCORD—CONSIDERATION BY ONTARIO LEGISLATURE

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein: I have a question for the Leader of the Government in the Senate along the lines of that asked by Senator Bazin as it pertains to the Province of Ontario.

Last week the Premier of Ontario indicated that, in any event, he intended to put over any consideration of a resolution leading from the Meech Lake Accord to the fall session of the legislature. The Ontario Legislature is currently in session. I take it that, based on the Constitutional Accord as now set out in legal terms, "as soon as possible" would oblige the Premier of the province to put the resolution before the Ontario Legislature forthwith.

● (1440)

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, the honourable senator is asking me for an interpretation of that clause, which I am hesitant to give. I suppose that much depends on when the prorogation or, indeed, the dissolution of the present Legislature of Ontario will take place. My honourable friend will be in a better position than I to know that.

Senator Grafstein: I used to be, honourable senators, but that is no longer the case.

1987 CONSTITUTIONAL ACCORD—CONSIDERATION BY NOVA SCOTIA LEGISLATURE

Hon. John B. Stewart: Honourable senators, in view of Senator Murray's response, might I ask him if in the case of Nova Scotia, where the session has been terminated, there has been any commitment by Premier Buchanan to call the Legislative Assembly of that province back into session before the time at which it would normally meet? Has any understanding been reached in that respect, or is that a matter to be decided by the authorities in Nova Scotia?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, it is a matter to be decided by the authorities in Nova Scotia. I myself have not discussed the matter with Premier Buchanan or any of his colleagues. It would not be unprecedented for that historic Legislative Assembly, which is the seat of responsible government in this country, to meet during the summer or the fall.

Senator Stewart: Am I to understand that the Leader of the Government is saying that discussion of that point was not thought to be necessary, and that the Premier is entirely open to decide this matter without any suggestion of a commitment to the Prime Minister or to any other federal minister?

Senator Murray: All I can say, honourable senators, is that I have not discussed the matter with the Premier of Nova Scotia or with any of his ministers. Nova Scotia's commitment is the same as that of all other provincial governments and of the federal government; that is, to table those constitutional texts in the Legislative Assembly as soon as possible.

FIRST MINISTERS' ACCORD—REQUEST FOR ANSWERS

Hon. Jeremiah S. Grafstein: Honourable senators, a number of questions were asked of the Leader of the Government in the Senate following the Meech Lake accord. The leader said at that time that he would delay responding to those questions until, I think, this time. Could he let us know now whether he intends to respond to those questions? Some of them dealt with important principles. Does he intend to wait to respond to those questions until such time as this chamber or other chambers have had a fuller opportunity to deal with the detailed resolution?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): I would prefer the latter course, honourable senators. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the fact that there may be outstanding some delayed answers to questions of my honourable friend and others. I will undertake to bring to the chamber prepared replies to those questions.

Senator Grafstein: I appreciate the leader's response. Could he, if at all possible, deal with the question I asked last week on the economic impact? Has the government conducted any studies of the economic impact on the federal spending power as it might apply under the new Accord?