

Oral Questions

I know that the Prime Minister does not want Canadians to know what he is proposing in this resolution and that is why he has proposed closure. But let me ask him now whether he will give the House of Commons an immediate assurance that during the full committee stage, even if that operates for a limited time under closure in advance, the people of Canada will have full access to the proceedings through television and radio coverage.

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, on the rather peculiar preamble to the question my information is that there have been more opposition spokesmen on this debate.

An hon. Member: That is false.

Mr. Trudeau: I have the figures of 22 Liberals, 19 Conservatives and five NDP.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: The opposition leader is concerned with putting the case before the Canadian people on the constitution. I point out to him that since the debate began, points of order, questions of privilege and other ways of debating something other than the constitution have been spoken to 27 times by the Liberals, ten times by the NDP and 41 times by the official opposition.

● (1420)

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Cossitt: Why don't you outlaw questions of privilege?

Mr. Trudeau: If the Leader of the Opposition's indignation was not as synthetic as it appears, he would be precisely urging his people to talk about the constitution and the subject matter for long hours if necessary, rather than to use all kinds of dilatory tactics not to talk about it.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, that is the second time the Prime Minister has declined to answer a question in this House. I wonder why he bothers to come. He shuts it down, he refuses to answer questions here, and he refuses to treat the House of Commons as anything other than a nuisance which he can ignore.

We heard yesterday from the Minister of Justice that the Minister of Justice intends to have the committee stay in Ottawa, thereby forcing Canadians who want to talk about their constitution to pay their way to come to Ottawa if they wish to be heard. Will the Prime Minister reject that proposal, that considerations on the constitution of all Canada have to be limited here to this city? Will he give the House the commitment now that there will be an opportunity for the constitutional committee, to which he is forcing this matter to go prematurely, to travel across the country so that its members will know the reality, indeed, in some cases the rage, that is growing across this country as the result of proposals by the government on energy and on the constitution? Will the

committee be allowed to travel, or will it be confined here to Ottawa, as it is confined to a deadline?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, on the question of witnesses coming to Ottawa, I suppose it is within the rights of the committee to suggest that they could help people who must travel to Ottawa at great personal expense by reimbursing them this expense.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): That is not in its reference.

Mr. Beatty: He hasn't answered a single question.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, let me repeat, for the Prime Minister's reference, the three questions which he has declined to answer today: One, will he remove the committee deadline of December 9 and give us a more reasonable deadline and thus dilute closure in advance; two, will he give us an undertaking now that there will be the opportunity for full television and radio coverage of the proceedings of the committee; and third, will he let the committee travel to the regions of the whole country so that the constitution of this whole country can be discussed throughout Canada and not in the back pocket of the Liberal party.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Cossitt: You're not a Liberal.

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, I am sure that from even the motion made yesterday by the opposition party, it is anxious to see progress made—

Mr. Jelinek: Answer the question.

Mr. Trudeau: —on the constitutional front. And I am sure from their earlier speeches that they are as anxious as we are to permit the House to go on to deal with economic matters and energy matters. This being the case, I think the Leader of the Opposition will realize that it is in the interests of the people of this country to have this constitutional matter dealt with expeditiously—

Mr. McDermid: Railroaded through.

Mr. Cossitt: Trudeau's railway.

Mr. Trudeau: —and brought to a conclusion. The way in which this is to be done depends to a great extent on the co-operation or otherwise that we receive from the members of this House, if they sincerely want to debate the issue. I repeat, the longer we take to get the resolution into committee, the less time the committee is bound to have in order to hear witnesses—

Mr. Epp: Answer the question.

Mr. Kempling: You're a disgrace.

Mr. Trudeau: —and to examine in detail the resolution. That is the explanation for our urgency in getting the matter