

Oral Questions

Accordingly, I have decided to introduce Premier McKenna's companion resolution in the House of Commons next week and immediately refer it to a special committee of the House.

Had I wanted to say "endorse", or "support", I would have said that, but I said introduce in the House for consideration by a committee, which committee would then hear from Canadians across the country and report back to the House for a vote. That strikes me as being an appropriate and democratic procedure.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister does not support the items in Premier McKenna's proposal, could he tell the House and Canadians where he expects the exercise reflected by the motion on today's Order Paper to lead?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to ask the Prime Minister whether the McKenna proposal, attached to the government motion appearing in today's Order Paper, will change the Constitution if the provisions it contains are adopted. In that case we will need the consent of the Senate and the provincial legislatures. Has the government asked the provinces to table the same resolutions before their respective legislatures?

[*English*]

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, Premier McKenna introduced into his legislature a companion accord, in response to which I, on behalf of the government, said:

Last Friday Premier McKenna wrote to inform me of his intention to improve on Meech Lake through a companion resolution that would add to, but not subtract from the Accord, and would address a number of concerns that have been raised.

I went on to say:

This is not a take-it-or-leave-it proposition—but a number of amendments that all Canadians should examine seriously—without undermining the Accord and the consensus it represents.

This was because Premier McKenna, in introducing his resolution into the New Brunswick Legislature, concluded by saying: "Now, therefore, the legislative assembly resolves that amendments to the Constitution of Canada be authorized to be made by proclamation—", et cetera, "—but only after the Constitution Amendment, 1987 comes into force".

Premier McKenna was saying in this resolution what he has said publicly many times since, that he has put this forward for consideration by Canadian legislatures in the hope that it can lead to further discussion among all provinces which, in turn, can lead to a resolution of the Meech Lake impasse.

It was in that spirit that I undertook to introduce it into the House of Commons.

• (1420)

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I am asking these questions because I think Canadians want to have a greater understanding of the process that the Prime Minister wants to follow and where the Prime Minister expects it to lead, especially in connection with the specific items raised by Premier McKenna.

I again repeat the point of my second question, which is whether or not the Prime Minister would like to see each of the provincial legislatures consider the same annex that is attached to the resolution to set up the special committee which is before the House. In particular, what role does the Prime Minister see for the Senate in consideration of the McKenna proposals and other proposals to break the constitutional impasse?

I ask this because if the Senate and provincial legislatures are not involved in dealing with the companion resolution, how does the Prime Minister ever expect the contents of that resolution to become part of the Constitution of Canada?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the other legislatures can speak for themselves and make up their own minds as to how they want to entertain what has been a positive approach by Premier McKenna, which is designed to try to break a log jam.

I speak for my government and we have introduced it into the House of Commons for consideration by a special committee of the House. It has been agreed that at three o'clock tomorrow afternoon the three party leaders will speak in respect of the procedures that they hope to have followed. At that time I will spell out, as will my hon. friend no doubt, my views in respect of the most expeditious and appropriate manner in which a committee of the House of Commons might proceed.