

Dominion-Provincial Conference

ready within three weeks, is it the intention of the minister to bring forth that legislation within three weeks?

Hon. Paul Hellyer (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Parkdale is an optimist, and so am I. Certainly everything possible will be done to prepare this legislation, but as I indicated earlier today it will take some weeks to draft it, after the government had decided on its policy. I know that my hon. friend, along with all members of the house, will give us every encouragement to move forward with this important legislation.

Mr. Stanley Haidasz (Parkdale): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I wish to inform the house that yesterday in answer to the question by the hon. member for Broadview I said "a few weeks", not "three weeks".

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, will the minister check with the Minister of Finance to see whether this optimism will wear off on him too?

Mr. Hellyer: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is an optimist, otherwise he would not be the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Gilbert: On the question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the hon. member for Parkdale. I thought he said "three" instead of "a few".

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

DOMINION-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE

HOUSE DEBATE PROVIDED THROUGH PRE-ARRANGED MOTION TO ADJOURN

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): moved:

That this house do now adjourn.

He said:

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this debate is to permit hon. members of this House and particularly those in the opposition parties, to express their opinions about the whole process of constitutional review. Opportunity to state the position of the government was given me during the last few days. It is not my intention today to repeat what I said at that time. The importance of the conference, and of the work in which it is engaged, does require me to make a short report, however.

Those members who viewed the conference proceedings either actually, on television or through radio, are aware of the wide range of subjects which were considered, and of the even wider range of views which were expressed about those subjects. Notwithstanding the divergency of opinions, however, a considerable degree of consensus was reached as is evident in the final conference document which I have tabled today.

Obviously we did not in the three days of the conference acquire a new constitution, and no one ever suggested that that was possible. We did in those three days move a long distance toward a new Constitution.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, I should be less than frank if I did not say that I would have liked the conference to have adopted the federal proposal for an entrenched bill of rights, but I am very pleased that on many subjects we made a great deal of progress. An examination of the documents which I tabled this morning reveals that an impressive number of constitutional items were advanced an appreciable degree. The conference agreed to continue with the constitutional review, and at an accelerated pace; it was affirmed that studies of linguistic questions be undertaken by a committee of ministers; the same proposal was accepted about the item concerning the entrenchment of fundamental rights and liberties in the form of a constitutional charter; the spending power will be examined as will the question of regional disparities; the structure and role of the Senate and Supreme Court, two of the institutions of federalism, were brought into review, and so was the concept of the National Capital area, which is one of the very important institutions of federalism.

I believe this shows a remarkable degree of consensus on a large number of questions of considerable importance. There is still another aspect upon which the conference was very successful. I have in mind the opportunity it gave to the people of Canada to observe on a close and intimate basis the complexities, and the varieties, of the problems which must be taken into account in shaping the future of this vast country. The frank expressions of opinions voiced by the heads of the various provincial governments were a dramatic illustration of just how theoretical and how academic are many of the treatises which purport to explain the constitution of Canada and which purport to explain the way in which Canada is governed.