

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Stanfield: I am disappointed the Prime Minister did not make a statement on motions as was done by Mr. Pearson in February of 1968 and by the present Prime Minister in February of 1970. I should like to ask the Prime Minister whether he intends to make a statement to the House or to consult the House or the constitutional committee established by Parliament before June 28 with regard to the decision that the government of Canada will be making with relation to the charter placed before the government of Canada and the governments of the provinces by the constitutional conference?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): No, Mr. Speaker. I do not intend to make such a statement. Of course the procedure we foresee will be that both Houses of Parliament will have ample occasion to discuss all the provisions of the charter if on the 28th we realize that the provinces and the government of Canada want to proceed to that step. But between now and the 28th it is a matter of the federal cabinet and the other cabinets deciding whether they do want to proceed to the step when they will have discussions in their legislative assemblies and in Parliament.

Mr. Stanfield: I am disappointed there will not be more consultation because I am sure there are a number of aspects which are puzzling the Canadian people. I do not ask this in a controversial way since I am seeking information, but perhaps the Prime Minister will explain why it is necessary for each province to accept the whole package including a number of proposals which are not linked together really except in the sense that they are contained in the charter? Why is it necessary for the provincial governments and the federal government to agree to the whole package which means in effect that if any province objects to even one slight aspect of any proposal the whole project falls to the ground?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, because these matters have been dealt with in Canada for many years now and have been brought to a head at the federal-provincial conferences of the past three years, every government present at Victoria felt it had done enough thinking about these various things and that now they wanted to look at the package as a whole and decide whether they wanted to accept it or not. The Leader of the Opposition understands that without further meetings we could not have some provinces saying that they accept this part, other provinces saying that they accept another part, and the federal government saying that it accepts another part. We certainly would not have any agreement. The talks in Victoria were based on the consensus reached in February. A lot of time has been taken in drafting texts both before and at Victoria, and now we feel we have a package we can either accept or reject.

Mr. Stanfield: Is it the position of the Prime Minister that if any province fails to express approval of the total package by June 28 there will be no further effort made to reach an agreement with regard to the matters contained in the package or that at least no further discussions will be held for some period? If so, can the Prime Minister indicate to the House how long a period he

[Mr. Stanfield.]

envisages that constitutional discussions would be, if not in limbo, at least not proceeding if, as I say, one province should object to any part of the package?

Mr. Trudeau: The question is hypothetical, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Stanfield: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Prime Minister what the position of the government is in the event of this happening. I suggest with all respect that this is a matter of government policy and not a hypothetical question.

Mr. Trudeau: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker, a question which begins with "if" is hypothetical.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, can the Prime Minister assure the House that the process of constitutional reform will not be allowed to lapse simply because one province may not agree with every term of the proposed charter?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, this question is also hypothetical.

AGREEMENT OF FOUR WESTERN PROVINCES TO AMENDMENT FORMULA

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, probably some of these things are still confidential until an agreement is reached, but can the Prime Minister tell us today whether the four western provinces agreed to the amending formula?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, they have until June 28 to say whether they do or not. Obviously I cannot speak for them.

[Translation]

POSSIBILITY OF GENERAL ELECTION IF PROPOSED CHARTER NOT ACCEPTED AS PACKAGE

Mr. Réal Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question to ask the right hon. Prime Minister.

He indicated a few minutes ago that a whole package had been submitted to the provinces and that this whole package was to be studied for June 28. If it is rejected, can the Prime Minister tell us if he intends to call a general election to clarify the situation?

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings on a supplementary.

Mr. Hees: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.