

Oral Questions

Mr. Mulroney: Excuse me, Madam. Congratulations on your election as Deputy Speaker.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mulroney: The House has such a high opinion of you, Madam, that you were elected while you were away, and I congratulate you.

To Madam the Leader of the New Democratic Party, I just say that the Committee made a quite laudable effort by visiting almost all regions of the country, including the Yukon and the Territories, to solicit Canadians' opinions. With the publicity surrounding the information sessions of the Charest Committee, it is harder and harder to imagine Canadians who are not aware of what Parliament or the First Ministers are trying to do. You just have to turn on the television; that is all they talk about, day and night. So I think that everyone is making a reasonable effort to inform all Canadians, but we can always do more. And if the New Democrats' Leader has specific ideas about it, I would be pleased to hear them.

[English]

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): I have a supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

Clearly, my question to the Prime Minister was simply that Canadians need to know what is happening in the constitutional process. Certainly, the polls have indicated that people are not aware of what Meech Lake was all about. We cannot allow that to happen again.

I am simply suggesting to the Prime Minister that he, as leader of the country, has a responsibility to ensure that the public has the information to make its own decisions and conclusions.

On another matter, I want to ask the Prime Minister this. I am assuming that at some point there will be a First Ministers' meeting. I hope that there will be, if we are to have this issue really move along.

• (1130)

Will the Prime Minister ensure that the committee's recommendations on aboriginal rights, which have been of such grave concern and which were highlighted in the report, will in fact be reflected in a companion resolution?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I cannot predict what the results of these various consultations with the First Ministers will be.

As I understand the committee's report, it contains a number of important elements. It appears to me that should the First Ministers decide to get together it will be the equivalent of a legislative menu whereby they will decide among themselves how to propose to deal with these legitimate concerns.

First, the report recommends that the conditions of the Meech Lake Accord be accepted as they are, with the companion resolution. The companion resolution appears to contain some issues of clarification, as well as some issues of substance. I think that this is what the committee sought to have us discuss when the First Ministers get together.

With respect to the very important question of aboriginal rights raised by my hon. friend, I had the privilege under the previous constitutional provisions to chair two meetings of First Ministers in respect of seeking a constitutional amendment for justice for native peoples.

It is my view that had the province of Quebec been a signatory to the Constitution, and had the province of Quebec therefore been present at those constitutional negotiations, then given its very favourable disposition to aboriginal issues we would have achieved a constitutional settlement for aboriginal peoples. We came very close to doing that. Had Quebec been there we would have achieved it.

That is why it is so indispensable not only for Quebec and the rest of the nation but for our first peoples to have this matter resolved. Only with all the provinces around the table can the native peoples achieve the justice that they so richly deserve.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Madam Speaker, I realize that the Prime Minister cannot speak for the premiers of the provinces. I am not asking him to do that.

I remind the Prime Minister that he has a special responsibility for aboriginal people. He also has a special responsibility for the northern territories, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories.