

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, as to the introduction to the question by the Leader of the Opposition, he reproaches me for saying one thing privately and another publicly. I ask him and the House, in fairness, what would the reaction of the provinces and the Leader of the Opposition have been had I come out of a meeting with the British Prime Minister and said: "We will act whether the provinces agree or not"? He knows very well—

An hon. Member: That's what you are doing anyway.

Mr. Trudeau:—they would have said it was a provocation; there they are already in June saying our Minister of Justice will fail, and so on. I said publicly what I hope still to be the case, that there would be an agreement between the provinces. I repeat, I did not say publicly—and even with hindsight I do not think it would have been wise to say so—that indeed we had speculated on the fact that some provinces might disagree with the package, because then I am sure we would have had howls from the premiers and howls from the Leader of the Opposition, as he has howled before, Madam Speaker, at what he called provocation of the premiers when we announced in advance that maybe success will not take place.

In so far as his question about the written request is concerned, I confess I do not remember any such written request. I will check my memory and with my officials to see if there has been a written request to that effect to the British Prime Minister or to any previous British prime ministers. I do know that I would not even ask for that. I just said that we would take it as required that if they get a request from the Canadian Parliament they will have no choice but to act.

An hon. Member: And the reply?

Mr. Trudeau: The reply was that she agreed with that.

Mr. Clark: Without extending this too long, Madam Speaker, I think in terms of preface the Prime Minister of Canada should follow one rule, and that is that the Prime Minister of Canada should tell the truth. That is the rule that should be followed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1425)

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, as to the question of any communication I ask the Prime Minister also to check with his Secretary of State for External Affairs, who said yesterday that such a letter had been received. I refer to a request made and a letter in reply received from Westminster. What I now want to have from the Prime Minister is an assurance that, once the Secretary of State for External Affairs is proved to have been stating the truth yesterday in his television interview, that letter and any written request occasioning that response will be tabled here in the House of Commons so that everyone will know all of the truth and all of the nuances which existed in that exchange of correspondence.

Oral Questions

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition asked if we had made a request in writing and had received a reply, and I said I could not remember any. Now the Leader of the Opposition is asking something else. He is referring to a letter to which the Secretary of State for External Affairs referred. It was a letter from the British Prime Minister. In it she said in essence what every British minister has said—and what the Prime Minister herself has said since the beginning—that the trouble was with the timing, not with the substance, and that they had no doubt that with a request from the Canadian Parliament they would have no choice but to put it through. She did say, as I told the House Friday, that the ministers had been told in September or October that with a charter in the package it would be more difficult. That was the position the British Prime Minister took.

Mr. Clark: Will you table it?

DATE OF PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS WITH BRITISH MINISTER

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, my questions are also addressed to the Right Hon. Prime Minister. In view of the statements he has just made regarding the exchange of correspondence, I request that he table that correspondence.

I would like to ask the Right Hon. Prime Minister on what date or dates he last met personally with any member of the British cabinet, at which meeting, or meetings, Canadian constitutional matters were discussed. Who was the minister, or ministers, he met with, and where?

An hon. Member: Order paper.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I could not give the exact date from memory. If the hon. member had given me notice I would have been able to tell him, but I believe it was some time in December. It might have been late November, but I think it was some time in December, and the minister in question was the then minister of defence, Mr. Pym.

Mr. Epp: Madam Speaker, that is the meeting to which I am referring, the meeting which took place on December 19, 1980. At the meeting of December 19, 1980, in Canada between the Right Hon. Prime Minister and the Right Hon. Francis Pym, did the Prime Minister express to Mr. Pym the extreme concern in Canada about proceeding with the constitutional resolution as planned by the government?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, once again I want to point out to the House that it is not customary for me or, I hope, any of my interlocutors, to give details of conversations held in private between a head of government and another head of government or important minister on a visit to Canada.

I regret that this has resulted in some lack of candour in discussing afterwards with the press what took place in the case of Downing street. I would like to take the same attitude