

Oral Questions

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

REDISTRIBUTION OF RIDINGS—SUGGESTED AMENDMENT OF BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACT TO MAINTAIN PRESENT LEVEL OF MEMBERSHIP IN CERTAIN PROVINCES

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question to the Prime Minister. Having regard to the suggestion I made three weeks ago and since concerning redistribution, has any decision been made by the government in relation thereto, particularly in view of the fact that time is of the essence?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Yes, Mr. Speaker. We carried out our part of the undertaking and the House leader has effectively met with the House leaders of the other parties. He indicated ways in which we thought the problem might be approached, but as of this date, or rather as of yesterday, our House leader told us that the House leader of, shall I say, some other party has not been as forthcoming as we had hoped. However, I hope the particular House leader will read in *Hansard* that the right hon. gentleman feels that time is of the essence.

REQUEST FOR STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENTION IF DEFEATED ON BUDGET OR ITS RESOLUTIONS

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is apparently in good humour this morning in answering questions so I shall ask him another one. Having regard to the almost daily pronouncements and ultimatums on the part of the New Democratic Party as to what the government must do in order to get its support, and the statements that have been made by the President of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister outside the House, would the Prime Minister now say whether or not, if the government is defeated either on the budget itself or on the resolutions, an election will be called? Apparently he has made his decision.

• (1150)

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, in the hubbub I missed part of the end of the question, but I think the attempt was to make a distinction between pronouncements and ukases, and we are not quite sure which carries more weight.

Mr. Diefenbaker: The noise came from members behind the Prime Minister who apparently were endeavouring to answer for him. I ask him now whether or not some of the statements he has made outside the House and also a couple that were made on television by the President of the Privy Council mean that a defeat either on the budget itself or on the resolutions will result in dissolution? I ask him that for two reasons. First, the House has the right to know and not to be told outside the House. Second, if such an election should be called, with redistribution having been completed, the Minister of Justice and I will be in the same constituency because his home is there. That will be the battle of the century.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton).]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Simplifying the question, I ask him why parliament should not know that which is being spread around by himself and other ministers concerning what will happen? Will there be an election or will there not, or are these ultimatums pretence and sham on the part of the NDP?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I cannot really instruct the right hon. gentleman on the constitution. He knows that two possibilities are always present.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): He knows what he did, too.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I think the right hon. gentleman has given me reason to pause and welcome this redistribution because I would not want to miss this battle of the century.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order please. I will, of course, recognize the right hon. gentleman for a supplementary, but I think I owe it to the House to remind hon. members that there are just five minutes before the end of the question period.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, you will have noticed that the applause comes from the NDP which fears the next election. I ask the Prime Minister why the House of Commons should not have the information which he and some of his ministers are spreading around the country that there will in fact be an election?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to state here in the House what I have stated on the outside, that the constitution provides two ways to solve this problem. Either I can go to the Governor General and hand in my resignation as Prime Minister—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bell: I think he is home this weekend.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see that this alternative has received applause but not from the front benches. The other way is to advise the Governor General to dissolve parliament. These are the two possibilities.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Ask the NDP. They will tell you.

Mr. Trudeau: Which one would be exercised is a hypothetical question because we do not really expect to be defeated on the budget.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I think we should perhaps leave the debate on this matter now.