

Supply

House. If there is agreement here to allow an extra eight minutes for the Hon. Minister to answer questions, I am easy. Is there unanimous consent to allow an extra eight minutes for questions and comments?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your reasonable approach in this matter and that of my colleagues in the House. Actions often speak louder than words. I observed that when the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and the First Ministers met during a series of meetings regarding aboriginal rights, there was no fruitful outcome, that the meetings ended in the early afternoon with statements of regret. But when it came to bringing Quebec back into the Canadian constitutional family, which is a legitimate matter and one we all support, the Ministers met throughout the night and produced results. What can the Minister do now to reassure Canadians and the aboriginal peoples that the same kind of commitment will be demonstrated with regard to aboriginal peoples and self-government for them?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I think the facts speak for themselves in this regard. We had, unfortunately, in the aboriginal constitutional conference what I would call wide apart positions on the part of the representatives of the aboriginal peoples and certain of the provinces. We had been able to garner for the federal position very substantial support, but it was not sufficient to get the kind of consensus that I think would be essential under our Constitution, which provides for an amendment with two-thirds of the provinces representing 50 per cent of the population. Significant agreement was also required by representatives of the aboriginal peoples present. A realization came that we were not able to bridge the gap and that more work had to be done. More work will be done because the federal Government is prepared to give leadership in finding areas of common ground.

The Prime Minister has stated perhaps the obvious, that one can keep people together at a First Ministers' meeting, but at some point in time, whether having to do with aboriginal peoples or other matters of such immense importance—as was the case in bringing Quebec back into the constitutional process—an assessment must be made as to whether or not it is possible to get consensus. Happily, in terms of the developments that have taken place concerning the agreement signed last week, there was not only consensus but unanimity. That state did not exist with the aboriginal constitutional conference. We did not have unanimity. We had some very sharply stated differences which emerged after many, many months, weeks, hours and days of discussion and negotiation, not only with ministers but also with officials.

Over the course of the last year I have spent a very substantial period of time trying to get a constitutional amendment on behalf of the federal Government for the aboriginal peoples of our country. We have tried to give leadership. We have tried to bring the provinces and the aboriginal peoples toward a position that we think will serve our country and the aboriginal

peoples well, by having a constitutionalized provision for self-government. We continue to believe that we should have that constitutional provision. We are now canvassing the suggestions of representatives of aboriginal groups as to how we should proceed. As well, I will be consulting with the provinces to obtain their views.

● (1240)

Until we can develop an alternative regime, I do not think, as suggested in this particular motion, that it would be fruitful or helpful to convene a First Ministers' conference at this time. This is an item that can be placed on the agenda at the annual meetings on constitutional amendments. I believe at this time we should have an ongoing and continuing exchange, particularly with the aboriginal peoples, as to how they think we should develop this. That is what I am now in the process of doing.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East): Mr. Speaker, the resolution before the House of Commons today deals with two important matters. First, it deals with a request made by Yukon and the Northwest Territories that we change the provision in the Meech Lake Accord which requires the unanimous consent of all provinces to establish new provinces. Second, we are discussing the request of the aboriginal peoples that we hold further federal-provincial conferences to entrench aboriginal self-government.

The Liberal Party supports both requests and will vote for this resolution today. In doing so, we do not believe that the passage of this resolution will in any way detract from the principles agreed upon in the Meech Lake Accord and in the Meech Lake-Langevin resolution.

I would like to say a few words about the process which allows for further discussion and for amendment of the Meech Lake Accord. It seems to me that the basis of the Meech Lake Accord is the adherence of Quebec to the constitutional document of 1982. The thrust of the Accord is to meet the five conditions laid down by Quebec in May of 1986 for adherence to the Constitution.

What were those five conditions laid down by Quebec in May of 1986? They were: first, the explicit recognition of Quebec as a distinct society; second, a guarantee of increased powers for Quebec in matters of immigration; third, a limitation of the federal spending power; fourth, revision of the amending procedure including recognition of Quebec's right of veto; and fifth, Quebec's participation in appointing judges to the Supreme Court of Canada.

We believe that the Meech Lake Accord and resolution responded to those five demands. However, very often when dealing with certain matters we must then examine what has been agreed upon to see how it touches on other parts of the Constitution and on other rights. As we do that, we see that this agreement could possibly touch on other matters such as aboriginal rights, the rights of the Territories and linguistic rights. We can maintain what was agreed upon in response to