

The open-endedness of the proposals will be a boon to the new special joint committee. It will be up to them, for example, to design the new reformed Senate, based not only on the government's recommendations but on what Canadians tell them.

The provincial governments have now been heard from, and the government has recognized the realities of the amending formula. Political reality in autumn 1991 will not accept a region based approach, however desirable a piece of political science. Any change to section 41 requires unanimity, but all of the changes offered yesterday are achievable under the general formula of 7/50.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

THE CONSTITUTION

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the right hon. Prime Minister.

Why will the Prime Minister not do the right thing and recognize the inherent right to self-government of the aboriginal people of Canada in the Constitution right now. Why wait 10 years?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I suppose it is a good thing that we are going quickly to the special joint committee so that these matters can be discussed there.

It is a legitimate question and an important one. As the Leader of the Opposition from his long experience in Indian Affairs will know, the proposal in this document is a very substantial step forward toward the entrenchment in the Constitution of a general right of self-government for the aboriginal people. The 10 year period that is set out is a period that allows for negotiations based upon a certainty among the aboriginal people of their constitutional rights. As the Leader of the Opposition will know, in effect, for those people who conclude negotiations, that constitutional right vests earlier because we are

Oral Questions

prepared to entrench negotiations that are achieved. I think it is a sensible, reasonable position.

What we are seeking in these proposals is something that will find acceptance across the country. I believe this will, but naturally that and other matters are capable of being discussed in the special joint committee that will hold its first meeting later this day.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the minister. Why does he not do exactly what was done in 1981? After a long debate there were a lot of lawyers around town telling us we could not do what we did; but we did it. It was done in committee by the three parties in this House of Commons. The same argument was made; we had to wait some years to be able to do this, and the House of Commons decided to do it at that time. Why don't we do the same thing with self-government?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, first of all I am very pleased that the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of his party, is endorsing here on the floor of the House the concept of self-government. Certainly that will help us in the deliberations that we undertake.

• (1420)

Our problem with this issue is not a problem with lawyers. Sure, there are too many of them around town.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. minister.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Mr. Speaker, Maureen is in Halifax.

Our problem, Sir, is to find a proposal that can find general acceptance across the country and that will establish the best circumstances in which we can move forward toward a system of justice for our aboriginal people, status people and others.

As the Leader of the Opposition knows, this government has already taken historic action this summer with the establishment of a royal commission which will deal with some of the issues.

Constitutional issues are urgent. We believe that there is a chance to take a very large step forward toward entrenching a right to self-government, and we hope we