

QUESTION PASSED AS ORDER FOR RETURN

TRAVELLING EXPENSES FOR CABINET MINISTERS

Question No. 1,062—**Mr. Beaudoin:**

During the fiscal years ending March 31, 1965, 1966, 1967 and 1968, what amounts were paid by the government in travelling expenses for each federal Cabinet Minister?

Return tabled.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

DOMINION-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE

PREFERENTIAL POSITION TO DISCUSSION OF ECONOMIC MATTERS

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. In view of the request made by several of the provincial premiers in western Canada that economic matters should be given priority over the other important matters to be discussed at the federal-provincial conference next week, is it the intention of the government to comply with this request?

Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we have already complied with this request. If the hon. gentleman would look at the agenda that we have tabled, he would see that the matter of distribution of powers has a high place on the agenda and that with-in distribution of powers we specify fiscal matters and the spending power of the federal government.

I think it is important for the public to understand that the constitutional aspects of the spending power are really the ones that should be discussed. When the provinces are worried about the federal government's interfering—as they say—in certain provincial priorities, what they are really doing is calling into question the spending power as exercised for 100 years by the federal government. We are prepared to reopen discussion on this if and when the provinces want, except that we do believe that it is essentially a constitutional matter. We also believe that the provincial demands for discussing this matter can fit very easily within the agenda, which has been modified since November, to answer this demand by certain provinces.

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Hees: Mr. Speaker, before I ask a supplementary question I would point out to the Prime Minister that naturally it was impossible for me to know what priority would be given—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Hees: —to economic matters because the program has just been—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member should ask his question.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

SUBMISSION OF BILL TO SUPREME COURT OF CANADA

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): I should like to ask the Prime Minister a supplementary question. Is it the intention of the government to comply with the request of provincial premiers that the Official Languages Bill be submitted to the Supreme Court of Canada to test the constitutionality of several important parts of the bill?

Right Hon. P.-E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): On this, Mr. Speaker, we have already complied with the request of some provinces, that we do not proceed with the bill in the house until the federal-provincial conference. This compliance caused us to retard our intention to proceed with the bill last December and we have since kept postponing it. As the hon. member knows, the bill is ready and has been brought in for first reading. We are postponing consideration of it by the house until the federal-provincial conference, which is now only a week away.

Although we will hear further argument by the provinces, it is our hope that they will continue to give to the language question that amount of priority we all agreed to give it last February, and that there will be no objection to our proceeding with this bill, which we think is of extreme priority. If the provinces have some objection to a specific section of the bill, we would want to consider it; if there is no agreement then there is the possibility of the matter being referred to the house.

Replying to the hon. member's remark, I might add that I realize it is through no fault of his that the agenda could not be tabled until now. We had to wait until agreement was reached on the tabling date.