

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[English]***MEECH LAKE ACCORD**

**Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition):** Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister.

Yesterday, after the report of the special committee on the companion resolution was made public, the media showed a favourable reaction by provincial premiers to the idea that a First Ministers' Conference on the constitution would be useful at this time.

In view of this reaction, will the Prime Minister call a First Ministers' Conference on the constitution and, if so, will he tell us what its date will be?

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with the premiers, yesterday and last evening, about this possibility. All of them are interested in the prospect of a First Ministers' Conference. Some are concerned about the timing, and some have concerns about some of the substance of the report. I have decided, as I have indicated, to send Senator Murray urgently to visit with all the premiers. He should be through those visits within a matter of days. As soon as that is done, I will be in touch with the premiers in respect of a first ministers' meeting.

I have always said that I would be happy to hold it if I were of the view that there was a prospect of resolving a very serious constitutional impasse. I will wait for Senator Murray's report within the next few days and make that decision.

**Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, at least when it comes to the reports of the media, both in the press and on television, no premier has said that he is unfavourable to the idea of an early constitutional conference.

Do I take it from what the Prime Minister has said that in spite of this reaction, the public reaction at least by the provincial premiers, it is possible that the Prime Minister will not call a First Ministers' Conference before June 23? If so, does he think this is a constructive approach to this matter, in view of the fact that the special committee of the House on the companion resolution found unani-

mously that the date of June 23 is an important date and as the committee put it, a political reality?

• (1120)

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker, I think that all members of the House would want to congratulate members of that committee from all political parties for the very constructive work they did in bringing forward a report of this nature in quite record time. I join in congratulating all members of the committee who took part.

The committee did not recommend that a first minister's conference be held at any given time. The reason for that presumably was, given their knowledge of the country, that they thought this was a value judgment that should be made by the Prime Minister at an appropriate time, given certain circumstances, which is precisely what I propose to do.

**Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, others who have read this report have taken a somewhat different interpretation of the conclusions of the committee. Surely, the point of the report was that the ideas in it should, could, and must be addressed by first ministers. Surely, that is the point of the report.

*[Translation]*

Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Prime Minister why he no longer thinks that calling a First Ministers' Conference as soon as possible would be the best way to get out of the constitutional impasse? Why is the Prime Minister wasting precious time when the future of our country is at stake?

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Madam Speaker, sometimes I find the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition a little confusing.

Hurriedly calling a conference of First Ministers at this time, which would hardly produce a satisfactory solution, might be the worst thing a prime minister of Canada could do.

That is why I intend to make a very careful assessment of the statements of the Premiers and the results of Senator Murray's interventions. If the Premiers are called to discuss this all—important national question, at this crucial moment in our history, the conference must succeed. That is what I want. I want a conference