

Oral Questions

there is a means of extending the deadline, should that prove necessary, just exactly what does the federal government intend to do and what is its response to this particular situation in the province of Manitoba?

• (1120)

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, in Article 1 of the document that was signed last week, there is a clear undertaking on the part of the Premiers of New Brunswick, Manitoba and Newfoundland, to use every possible effort to achieve a decision prior to June 23, 1990.

We still believe that that target can be achieved and we also believe that every effort is being undertaken by the respective legislatures to achieve that target. The fact that there is a procedural wrangle is something that we anticipate the respective legislatures, in this particular case the legislature of Manitoba, will deal with. The federal government is offering its assistance in every way, shape and form, as well as with the aboriginal people as a result of the meetings yesterday and ongoing discussions to see whether we can be helpful in breaking the logjam.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The right hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Madam Speaker, my question is also for the Deputy Prime Minister.

It now appears that the Meech Lake Accord will not meet the deadline in Manitoba. The Manitoba legislature adjourned a few minutes ago until Monday and it is becoming more pessimistic in that Assembly every minute.

Let no one put the blame on Elijah Harper or on the aboriginal people of this country. The blame rests squarely on the shoulders of one man. The man, who, in his own words, chose to roll the dice and he chose the date when to roll the dice. By delaying the First Ministers' Conference, he has gambled with the future of our country. That is what he has done.

I put this question to the Deputy Prime Minister: Will he go immediately to his leader, the Prime Minister of our country, and suggest in the strongest terms, that the current constitutional crisis is now his, and his alone, and his responsibility.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, let me assure the right hon. member that we are not putting the blame on anyone and certainly not putting the blame on Elijah Harper, just to make that very clear.

There are procedural rules and privileges that any member can exercise in the democratic process. I find it very strange that at this late hour, particularly as the right hon. member suggests that there is a crisis, that he would engage in the kind of political rhetoric that he has just engaged in. I will simply refrain from commenting on the latter part of his question.

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Madam Speaker, the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Premier of Manitoba both warned the Prime Minister on several occasions during the past few months, that legislative time was running out. So did the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Yet, the Prime Minister refused to heed those warnings of his two colleagues. He allowed time to run and he allowed pressure to build.

I want to ask the Prime Minister again, if he will impress upon his leader that the consequences are grave and that the responsibility for solving what has now become a very grave issue, lies with the Prime Minister of Canada who put us in this mess.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I do not want to be argumentative but I think the right hon. member would recall that the first effort in breaking the logjam came from the legislature of New Brunswick, wherein they brought forth the idea of a parallel resolution which was followed by immediate action on the part of the federal government in setting up the Charest committee.

That is a fact. That process did take place and quite frankly, notwithstanding what the right hon. member suggests, there was an undertaking by all First Ministers to use every possible effort to pass the Meech Lake Accord prior to June 23. We believe that that undertak-