

[Translation]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, there is a very simple reason for this. This is the result of the lengthy consultations I have had with others, other than the House leader, which ended only around 20 minutes before three o'clock this afternoon. I was therefore unable to elaborate on this point and to discuss with the Leader of the Opposition the details of what we agreed on, namely, that the date of February 6 was the final date, that there would be no other requests for future extensions and that this was a gesture of exceptional generosity which the opposition appreciated. This is why we agreed to the final date of February 6. However, in spite of what my hon. colleague, the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) has said, I want to make it very clear that there is no question in the agreement that there might be other requests to grant a further extension to the committee. As we understand the agreement we have reached, the date of February 6 is final and there will be no further extension granted to the committee. It will report on the sixth at the latest, even though, in principle, if the committee so wishes its proceedings could be completed earlier. However, in our opinion there are limits to what is reasonable and we believe that a time-frame of three months in committee is sufficient, because if we indeed go on until February 6—and I believe that the Conservative House leader as well as my colleagues of the New Democratic Party understand this—the committee will have considered the constitutional proposals for three months even though we had previously provided a much shorter period. I believe that the hon. member for Yukon, who was not present at this meeting, must have gotten carried away when he said, "We can assure you that we shall ask for an extension in late January or early February". Such was not the spirit of these negotiations; we have discussed at length and in good faith in the last two weeks, and I must say that the government has been extremely generous in the concessions it has made without setting any conditions, without requesting a deadline for the third phase and without even having agreed on the form of this third phase, as my hon. colleague will certainly recognize if he is sincere. I believe that he should not now state in advance that his party will try to create obstacles and have another filibuster in committee, because this was certainly not the spirit of the discussions we had with the House leaders, and it is certainly not the spirit that will animate the discussions in the days and weeks to come when this very important constitutional issue is debated in committee and subsequently in the House of Commons.

I therefore want to make it very clear that the agreement is firm and that while the extension we are granting may not seem as generous as some would want it, as in any negotiation and any agreement, some give and others receive. In view of the circumstances, I believe that the extension is generous. I want to make it very clear that this is an ultimate deadline and that it corresponds exactly to what was agreed among the

Point of Order—Mr. Clark

House leaders and what was the subject of the resolution of this House which has now been passed.

[English]

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, the discourtesy to which I made reference was the reluctance—I will use that word—of the government House leader to communicate to the deputy House leader of the official opposition, the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), the contents of the proposal which was to be laid before the House when, during the question period and after the hour specified by the government House leader, the opposition deputy House leader crossed the floor, spoke to the government House leader and asked him for the contents of that proposal. It would have helped the House, I think, had that information been conveyed at that time.

The only point I want to make, Madam Speaker, is that the record of the House shows very clearly that we are pleased that the date of February 6, which we had originally proposed, has been accepted, but we accepted it with the caveat that if the people of Canada, represented by responsible individuals or responsible groups in large numbers, still have not been adequately heard by that time, we will not be party to closing off the right of the people of Canada to be heard on their constitution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): The last words of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) were that they would not be party to the closing off on February 6. If that is their position, then they should not have voted for the motion.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: I want to make it quite clear, Madam Speaker, that this date is the result of unanimous agreement of all parties of the House.

An hon. Member: Nonsense.

Mr. Trudeau: It says "no later than February 6". If the committee feels its work is finished earlier and there is a consensus in the committee to finish earlier, I suppose that would be permissible under the motion agreed to in every part of the House.

Mr. Clark: After having heard the caveat of the hon. member for Yukon, I point out that the caveat was quite clear.

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition wishes to withdraw his consent to that motion and put in a condition, we are prepared to permit him to withdraw his consent.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The caveat stands.

Mr. Trudeau: It should be obvious, Madam Speaker, that it would be possible to have hundreds of briefs coming in forever, and to have a new agreement in February to postpone the date.