

Oral Questions

and the Premiers. We are not asking about how it is going or what the substance is. We are asking him about the procedure to be followed if an agreement is reached. I want to refer to what the Prime Minister told the House of Commons on May 4 as reported at page 5689 of *Hansard*. When asked about parliamentary amendments to the Meech Lake Accord the Prime Minister said:

—by and large, this is what we are going to bring forward into the House of Commons and this is what will be ratified by provincial Legislatures.

Which is the correct position? Does the Government have an open mind about amendments, as the Deputy Prime Minister seems to have suggested yesterday? Or does the Government have a closed mind and will use its huge majority to block any amendments to the Accord which may be presented in the House of Commons?

• (1420)

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, if there is any attempt to confuse the issue, it is coming from the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition. That does not surprise me, given the signals that are coming from that Party. We are not sure where they really stand on the issue of constitutional reform or on this particular Accord.

I am glad that he quoted the Prime Minister. As I said yesterday, and as the Prime Minister has indicated from day one, this is a very important issue. We are open to full parliamentary debate on the issue. I am prepared to sit down with the House Leaders to work out a satisfactory resolution to that. I am sure it will be done in the interests of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition and of all other Hon. Members of the House of Commons.

NATURE OF DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we are asking the Deputy Prime Minister a very clear question not only in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister of this country but as Government House Leader.

We are not talking about the substance, we are simply asking the Deputy Prime Minister about the procedure. Constitutionally, this Parliament has the right to amend any accord. Politically, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister, with their massive majority in the House of Commons, have the opportunity to block any reasonable amendment to the Meech Lake Accord.

Will we have a meaningful debate on the Accord, if it is successful, or is this going to be a charade? He can answer that question, if he has the authority to do so.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, that clear question has had a clear answer. I have responded to it before.

This issue was reported to the House on May 1. On May 11 we had a debate. We were prepared to extend the hours of debate and engage in a lengthy debate on the Monday when

this matter was introduced. We were prepared to extend it for two or three days. Hon. Members opposite were really not interested and really wanted to limit it to one speaker per Party.

We invited them to participate because we wanted their views and their comments to be taken into consideration prior to the final drafting. We asked for their advice at that time, and I am sure we will do so again. The fact is that the process has not been clearly established, but I have expressed a clear willingness to work with my counterparts to establish a satisfactory process that would be in the interests of all Hon. Members of the House.

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, we are asking about parliamentary debate, but we are also asking about committee hearings which give an opportunity to Canadian people to speak through the committees of Parliament.

Yesterday the Deputy Prime Minister refused to indicate whether or not there would be committee hearings. On May 26 in the Senate, Senator MacEachen asked the Government House Leader:

Can I conclude from what the Leader of the Government has said that, in any event, there will be committee study, whether undertaken separately in each House or jointly?

The reply by the Senate Government Leader was:

Yes, honourable senators.

Was the Government Leader in the Senate speaking for the Government when he said there would be committee hearings? Will there be committee hearings?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I find it strange that everyone is negotiating on behalf of the House Leader of the Liberal Party while he sits idly in his seat. I am not sure whether his job is under attack or whether he feels threatened, but one must wonder what is going on over there.

As I said before, I am sure the distinguished House Leader of the Liberal Party will be prepared to sit down with me, as will the Hon. House Leader of the New Democratic Party, to work out a satisfactory resolution. I certainly do not want to close off any option at this particular time.

POSSIBLE PASSAGE OF RESOLUTION BEFORE SUMMER RECESS

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, I hope one option will be closed off. It is the option in the statement made by the Government Leader in the other place who said, on the same day:

Let me state it as my personal opinion that I hope and believe that it will be possible for all legislatures to have passed these resolutions in their respective legislatures before the summer recess.