

Oral Questions

I think my hon. friend will find—

Mr. Andre: He keeps talking from his seat.

Mr. Mulroney: My hon. friend will find that it meets that test—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the right hon. Prime Minister could elevate the discussion.

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the House leader for that helpful comment. I have to, in fairness, give the opposition a 10 on that one. I just want to assure my hon. friend that it will either meet the tests of fairness to which we referred or I am sure that the House will make sure that it does.

• (1430)

There will be a debate, a very vigorous debate. Surely, the most fundamental thing is democracy as exemplified by a vigorous parliamentary debate. There will be a bill that will meet these tests. If these are challenged by my hon. friend then we will see and the House will decide. That is the way a democracy must function.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. It was reported today that the premier of Quebec said he had received assurances from the federal government that a national referendum would be held only to break a deadlock. In other words, the government will consult Canadians only to put pressure on the provinces.

I would ask the Prime Minister to make his intentions clear to this House. Will he hold a referendum only if the current negotiations fail?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we certainly want the current talks to succeed. I certainly hope they do. We made a good start, and I hope that very shortly, the Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs will give us a favourable report.

However, if it were impossible to reach an agreement, as a nation, we would have to break the deadlock somehow. We could not remain paralysed as a Parliament, as a government and as a nation. If no agreement is reached, the people will have to vote on the proposals.

Mr. Bourassa has already said that the offers could either be for independence or renewed federalism. We will have to define renewed federalism, and in order to transmit this redefinition to Quebecers and Canadians, we will have to consult them directly. This might mean using a referendum mechanism to take the pulse of the nation. I think that is quite legitimate and normal.

[*English*]

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, a supplementary for the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister speaks of the need to consult the people of Canada. I would like to say to him that while we are in agreement with that, surely the results of that consultation must mean something and must have some implications for the actions the government will then take.

His government House leader said yesterday that he did not support the recommendation of a consultative referendum, as defined in the Beaudoin—Edwards and the Beaudoin—Dobbie reports, which were signed by all three parties of this House including the Conservative Party.

Those reports indicated there should be in any consultative referendum a double majority or a majority in each region of this country which would include the four regions. Also, the north would be involved as one of the regions. There would be a majority in each region plus a national majority.

Does the Prime Minister still support that recommendation which his party signed and agreed to in two parliamentary reports?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, it is generally understood that because of the 1982 amending formula the ultimate decisions cannot be taken away from the provinces and the federal government, that the amending formula requires their assent.

To deal with the point raised by my hon. friend, let us say that as Prime Minister and as leader of the NDP or the House, we said today that we will take the position that the results of this referendum to be held would be binding in such and such a way. It would be irreversibly binding upon the country.