

Oral Questions

the acceptance of this government of the protocol amending the Anglo-Canadian double taxation agreement, which came into effect at the beginning of this year, and which seems to have been directly aimed at the minute pensions available to a large number of elderly Canadian residents, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil):

That the Minister of Finance make a statement on motions at the earliest opportunity explaining how the signing of this protocol came about and, in particular, indicating what steps the government proposes to take to relieve the financial burdens imposed on those unfortunate pensioners, many of whom are not even eligible for full Canadian pension benefits.

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for this motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

● (1415)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

THE CONSTITUTION

REQUEST FOR CONVENING OF FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): My question is directed to the Prime Minister, whom I first want to congratulate on receiving what he would regard as good news from the superior court of Quebec—

An hon. Member: Court of appeal.

Mr. Clark:—court of appeal? Court of appeal. I feel that the legal questions should be decided by the courts, and I am pleased that Parliament is agreeing to let that happen.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: My question concerns the other part of the process. It concerns the meeting here tomorrow of premiers of eight provinces to conclude their proposal for patriation of our Constitution, with an amending formula. The Prime Minister knows that in the telex to him from Premier Lyon there was a request for a meeting with the Prime Minister after the premiers had met for joint consideration of the new plan. If the Prime Minister receives such a proposal from those eight provinces, will he arrange to convene a first ministers' conference to consider that proposal?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I would have thought that the Leader of the Opposition would be somewhat hesitant to speak on behalf of the provinces in this matter. The last time he raised it in the House, it was to enjoin me to meet with the eight premiers meeting here in Ottawa. When, after some hesitation—considerable hesitation, I would say—I accepted to meet with them, then it appeared that they did not want to meet me. So I think

the Leader of the Opposition had better let the premiers handle this, and stay out of this business, himself.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The Prime Minister will want to consult the record to know just how wrong his rendition of history is, although he does confirm that he would prefer to have Parliament stay out of questions which are Parliament's business. My question to him stands. There is to be a meeting here tomorrow which the eight premiers involved believe will yield a new plan for bringing our Constitution home with an amending formula. They have formally requested the Prime Minister of Canada for an opportunity to discuss that plan with him. They have requested that in the telex in which they said:

Subsequently we hope to meet you—

That means the Prime Minister.

—for joint consideration of the new plan.

That is in the telex from Premier Lyon.

If there is a new plan brought forward, as the premiers expect there will be, will the Prime Minister of Canada agree to meet with them to discuss that plan, and will the Prime Minister consider convening a first ministers' conference to discuss that plan by which Canadians could patriate our Constitution and amend it here in an agreed way, and any other questions which he might want to put on the agenda? Will he convene a first ministers' conference if there is a proposal from those eight premiers tomorrow?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is making the same mistake which he made two weeks ago when he enjoined me to meet with the premiers to discuss something with them, to hear them out and to have a federal-provincial meeting of some sort. I repeat, it was after he had said that and pressed me—presumably, on behalf of the premiers—to meet and to discuss with them, it appeared that they did not want to meet and discuss with me. That is still the situation now.

The Leader of the Opposition says that Premier Lyon has sent me a telegram wherein he says he wants to discuss their plan with me. I have the telegram here, and the only part of it which refers to myself is in the final words. I read them:

It is our intention to communicate the conclusions of the meeting to you on the afternoon of the same day.

That does not sound as though they want to have a discussion with me.

An hon. Member: Read it all.

Mr. Trudeau: It sounds to me as though they are having a meeting in Ottawa, that they will try to discuss and hopefully agree amongst themselves, presumably to put the final touches on something which has not yet been quite agreed to. That is why I repeat, what I said last week in this House, that the veracity of the statement to the effect that they had reached an agreement was somewhat in doubt. It has been put in doubt since then by several of the participants who have said that

they still have some decisions to make. Premier Lévesque said that, and Premier Blakeney said that, so the Leader of the Opposition in this House really is carrying a brief for some who have not asked him to carry it for them.

● (1420)

I will be in Ottawa tomorrow. I am not sure how the intention of communicating the conclusions of the meeting to me will be fulfilled. I do not know if Premier Lyon wants to see me. I do not know if he will send me a letter—

An hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: What is beefing you, my friend?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member does not have the floor.

Mr. Forrestall: Who the hell cares?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: I can understand the frustration of members of the House when the Prime Minister twice refuses to answer a very simple question having to do with his duty to the people of this country, as the first minister of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: On April 3 Premier Lyon, the chairman of the provincial premiers' conference, sent a telex from which I have already quoted in the House, to the Prime Minister, in which he outlined the plan of the premiers to meet first and then, and again I quote, "Subsequently we hope to meet you for joint consideration of the new plan".

I am not particularly interested in debating with the Prime Minister what happened last week. What I am interested in knowing is whether the Prime Minister will accept his responsibilities as Prime Minister of this country, to resolve in a Canadian way, and in co-operation with the Canadian partners, the provinces, a question of important constitutional significance.

If there is the agreement the premiers expect tomorrow, will the Prime Minister use that agreement as the basis for exercising his duty and convening a first ministers' conference that will allow him and the ten first ministers of the country—the ten provincial premiers—allow the 11 first ministers to sit down and discuss a Canadian patriation package, with a Canadian amending formula? Will he do his duty in that way if he receives that kind of plan?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, could I ask the indulgence of the House to recall the events which led up to this question.

I was enjoined by the Leader of the Opposition to meet with the premiers. I said I would do it. Then a few of them, several I believe, said that they did not want to meet me. They said this publicly. This is not a figment of my imagination. They said they were not sure that I was invited. Some said that I could bang at the door but they would not let me in.

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Since then I have received a telegram—that is not referring to the April 3 one because it was after the April 3 one that I said that I would meet with them. Then it appeared that they did not all want to meet with me. They had not made up their minds yet about what they would do.

An hon. Member: No wonder.

Mr. Trudeau: Well, no wonder, all right. But they had not made up their minds.

Since then I have received a telegram telling me that it is their intention to communicate the conclusions of their meeting to me. I repeat, I had been prepared to meet with them. Now I am prepared to receive their communication in whatever way it comes. I will be here in Ottawa; I will be available, if one or several want to meet with me to communicate the conclusions. That was made clear ten days ago, that I was prepared to meet with them. I will see what they have agreed to do among themselves. Once again whether they will meet—

Mr. Lalonde: If they agree.

Mr. Trudeau: If they agree—whether they will want to meet or to send me a letter or what, but I am quite sure that the Leader of the Opposition will also be informed of the position that they take, if any.

The Leader of the Opposition knows the rules to which this House has agreed, that after today we will have Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday to consider what we want to do with this proposal presumably of eight premiers.

I do not think that the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting that in these five days we convene a federal-provincial conference. If the premiers indicate their desire to do so, and if a quick canvassing of my colleagues from the other two provinces indicate that they want to do so, certainly I will convene a conference in these five days if there is some measure of agreement. But the way we have written the House order is that on Tuesday evening we must make any final change we want to make to this resolution that is before the House.

● (1425)

The deadline is on the premiers, it is on myself, and it is also on the Leader of the Opposition. I take it that his party will see it as its duty to reflect on the meeting of the premiers. Hopefully the Leader of the Opposition will be communicated with also by the premiers in some way or other. Then his party, my party, and the New Democratic Party will make up their minds as to whether we can include something in the resolution by way of amendment on Tuesday. That is the way the House has accepted to play the rules.

I do not want to encourage the Leader of the Opposition to believe that in these five days we could easily have a conference of 11 first ministers. Two of them have already stated quite clearly that they did not want to meet if it was a matter of just looking at an amending formula without a charter. I must say that is the position of our party too. But still we will

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meet with them. Hopefully they will have made some progress. We will see what they say, even on the charter. Then the Leader of the Opposition and the other parties in this House will take their responsibilities for Tuesday night.

TIMING OF FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, we have made some progress. The Prime Minister is now agreeing to a first ministers' conference if that is requested by the eight premiers and if they bring forward a plan. But he has placed a limitation on it. The Prime Minister has agreed to a first ministers' conference within the next five days. I think most of us recognize that that is probably going to be impractical—desirable if possible, but probably impractical.

Is the Prime Minister limiting his suggestion, his willingness to convene a first ministers' conference, to the next five days or the next week? Or is he prepared to tell this House of Commons that whatever happens in the parliamentary agenda, whatever happens with the Supreme Court agenda, he will do his duty as the Prime Minister of the whole country and convene a first ministers' conference to discuss a patriation package agreed to by eight provinces if those eight provinces request such a meeting? Will he do that without time limitations?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Of course I will, Madam Speaker. The resolution before the House specifies an obligation on us to do that. It is specified that over the next two years we must have first ministers' conferences to try to get agreement on an amending formula. The Leader of the Opposition says no.

Mr. Clark: No. I am shaking my head at your behaviour.

Mr. Trudeau: It does, Madam Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition wants to have an undertaking from me that I will have a federal provincial conference. I am answering that I will be obliged to do so once we adopt this resolution.

Mr. Clark: If we do.

Mr. Trudeau: I guess the Leader of the Opposition wants to know when it will be held. It will be held in the next five days if we all agree it is useful. If it is not, the Leader of the Opposition accepted the proposition before the House that we want the Supreme Court to see the resolution in its final form. That is the essence of the bargain we made here, that there would be no further amendments after Thursday night, that the Supreme Court would be rendering its decision on the basis of the resolution as it will have been amended next week.

If the Leader of the Opposition is asking me if I will meet the premiers, the answer is yes, Madam Speaker. But I think that the Leader of the Opposition and the premiers themselves should realize that such a meeting will not be able to affect the resolution before the House by the very nature of the bargain that the Leader of the Opposition wrung out of us. That is the

nature of it, that we will not be able to accept any amendments after Thursday of next week.

If the Leader of the Opposition is asking me can we have a meeting in May, in June or in July, the answer is yes. But the results of that meeting cannot be in the resolution before the Supreme Court. Since the Leader of the Opposition, contrary I understand to the Premier of Alberta, has indicated that legality was the essence of it, I take it that after the Supreme Court has judged, in our words that will settle the matter. If the Supreme Court judges favourably, then there will be no difficulty in sending the resolution to London. I hope the Leader of the Opposition will agree to that, at least, because the leader of the Conservative Party in Alberta has not agreed to that apparently. He still wants to carry on the political fight.

Let me put it to this House: are we all agreed that once the Supreme Court has ruled favourably, that ends the matter?

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Trudeau: The Leader of the Opposition laughs, as he always does. But it is an important question. Otherwise the referral to the Supreme Court makes no sense.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

* * *

● (1430)

THE ECONOMY

GOVERNMENT PROGRAM TO DEAL WITH INFLATION

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister who knows that any resolution passed by this House can be changed by this House by unanimous consent. The Prime Minister is not very keen on meeting with premiers. My question to him is this. Premier Davis requested a first ministers' meeting to discuss real issues affecting this country, inflation and the economy. The Prime Minister has now said that while he shares the concern of Premier Davis, and he agrees that inflation is an unacceptable burden on the people of Canada, he refuses to meet with the premiers on that subject until the seven industrial nations meet here in Canada in July. He says also that he refuses to meet because the government has laid down an economic program in the budget specifically directed at dealing with inflation. The Prime Minister wants to solve the global problems before he deals with his own problems here.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the hon. member to co-operate with the Chair. The Leader of the Opposition took quite a lot of time of the House in his first round—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nielsen: What about the answers?