

formal protest has been forwarded to the Soviet authorities.

### NATIONAL UNITY

#### THE CONSTITUTION—MEETING OF PREMIERS OF WESTERN PROVINCES

**Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Government):** I now come to a question by the Honourable Senator Asselin on national unity. The question is as follows:

Honourable senators, my question is for the Leader of the Government. At the conclusion yesterday of a meeting of the four western premiers held in Lethbridge, a call went out for a permanent conference of first ministers to deal with the Constitution, with the first meeting to be convened soon after the Quebec referendum. I should like to know whether the government is receptive to the request of the four western premiers for such a conference?

The answer is as follows:

The federal government has not heard of a request to have a permanent conference of first ministers to deal with the Constitution. Nor has there been any formal communication with the government in regard to constitutional reform arising out of the recent conference of the premiers of the provinces of Manitoba, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

We have, however, received texts of communiqués and have noted the wish expressed in one of them that a meeting of the continuing committee of ministers on the Constitution (CCMC) be convened by the federal government soon after the Quebec referendum, and in that way to resume the constitutional review process.

As honourable senators are no doubt aware, on April 24 the Prime Minister was asked a similar question during a press conference. His reply was that in the event of a "no" vote in the forthcoming referendum there would be a need to continue the constitutional conferences as soon as possible. As well, he expressed the hope that, with a "no" vote, Mr. Lévesque would feel that he must participate in earnest in these conferences.

In the hypothetical case of a "yes" vote in the referendum, the Prime Minister stated that it would have to be determined whether the Premier of the Province of Quebec would be willing to participate in a federal-provincial conference on the renewal of federalism. If Mr. Lévesque refused, it would have to be decided whether a conference could be held without him. However, such a decision could only be made at the time.

Those are the answers I have been furnished with today, honourable senators.

[Senator Frith.]

### THE SENATE

#### NEWSPAPER REPORTS—QUESTIONS OF PRIVILEGE

**Hon. Robert Muir:** Honourable senators, I had other questions, but I am not going to pose them. I rise, really, on a question of privilege, if I may.

I am not here to try to lecture the brilliant men and women whom I see sitting around this chamber, and who have served their country in peace and war in provincial legislatures, in the federal cabinet and the House of Commons. They are brilliant people, and they are to be found all over this chamber.

This being so, one wonders why some journalist can come out of university and after two weeks on the Hill write terrible things about the Senate of Canada and the other place as well. It seems that such people become immediate experts.

• (2100)

I look at the report presented recently by Senator Croll, and other reports of committees of this house over the years, from which some of the best legislation in the world has been initiated. Then we have this unfortunate incident tonight, when there is no one present to answer questions. However, I must applaud the Deputy Leader of the Government for his brave front, and the manner in which he approached this situation.

I look around and I see so many academics, farmers, and others who have served their country for so many years in provincial legislatures, and some as provincial premiers. I do not forget our Speaker, a man who has worked in the field of labour over the years and been responsible for tremendous labour legislation; a man who has organized unions and generally done so much for the labour forces of this country. Yet, we come here tonight to elicit information, only to discover there is no one here to answer our questions.

While we are contributing to our country by our presence in this chamber, others will damn this institution. By the non-appearance of the ministers in this chamber tonight, we are pulling down the reputations of this institution.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Order!

**Senator Muir:** So many write about this institution, and condemn all of us. Those writers would not even run for dogcatcher because they could not get elected. It is a crying shame that all of us should be castigated in the manner in which we are.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Order!

**Senator Muir:** I should like to know, in response to the question of privilege, if the Deputy Leader of the Government can assure us that this will not occur again.

**Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Government):** I have nothing to add, honourable senators, to what I said on the subject earlier.

**Hon. Daniel A. Lang:** I rise on a point of real privilege. This is a privilege that affects us all in this chamber.

This matter was brought to my attention tonight by Senator Bird when she handed me a letter to the editor written by a