

*Government Orders*

The government is not prepared to put a measure which is already in place to a referendum.

Second, the act implementing the goods and services tax was not submitted to a referendum of the Canadian people because it was part of the election platform of this party in 1988. I can recall being asked numerous questions about it as we went door to door in 1988. It is my belief the Progressive Conservative Party and the government which had a mandate from 1984 to 1988 got a renewed mandate in part because of its commitment to repeal the manufacturers' sales tax and replace it with a consumer-based tax.

I will concede the precise nature of the tax was not defined at that point. An all-party committee subsequently recommended the form of tax which we now have. Representatives of the hon. member's own party participated in that. That has now been implemented and is behind us. If the people of Canada do not approve of the tax, that will be one of the issues on which they will judge the government in the next general election.

That is a matter suitable for adjudication in a general election. Constitutional matters may be open to referendum under certain circumstances, but I do not believe there is a demand, nor should there be a demand, in this country for submitting conventional pieces of legislation to the referendum process.

**Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North):** Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a singular privilege to speak on third reading of Bill C-81, an act to provide for referendums on the Constitution of Canada, and reflect the sentiments and wishes of my constituents from the riding of Winnipeg North.

• (1540)

At the outset I would like to commend the government for recognizing at last the need for a national referendum, which was proposed by the Liberal Party a little over a year ago on April 21, 1991, when my leader formally announced our party's nine-point plan for Canada's new Constitution.

It is high time we referred Canada to all Canadians and not fragmented portions for their final say. A national referendum will give Canadians outside Quebec a chance to tell their fellow citizens in Quebec they are important and essential to the country we know and love. It will give Quebecers a chance to say yes to all other Canadians from sea to sea.

The Right Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, a former

Liberal Prime Minister of our country, once said: "The foundation of a nation is will". I therefore say let the people express this foundation of Canada.

The referendum bill proposed by this government however has some remaining problems. While they call it a referendum, what the Conservatives are really proposing is more of a plebiscite.

A referendum and a plebiscite are not the same, although not infrequently mistakenly interchanged in usage. Allow me to cite a reference book entitled *Lawmaking by the People: Referendums and Plebiscites in Canada*, by one of our own colleagues, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. I quote from page 13 of his book:

The main difference between the two voting devices is therefore that a plebiscite is essentially a public opinion poll, but a referendum automatically binds a government to enact a law (or to refrain from doing so) according to the voters' wishes.

Indeed, what the government is really proposing is more of a plebiscite. What the government has really proposed, if it were not to be bound by the results of the vote, is a plebiscite in the context of this definition. If it were so, it would be the most costly public opinion poll at a cost to Canadian taxpayers of some \$100 million at a time of very high unemployment and intense suffering on the part of millions of Canadians without jobs.

But there will be greater suffering without a united Canada. There will be greater disappointment if every Canadian voter is not given the opportunity to express her or his will, her or his voice in a referendum.

I am therefore saddened that the Leader of the New Democratic Party said her party would not support this referendum bill. My sadness was joined by alarm and grave concern when I heard the separatists in this chamber applaud the New Democratic leader and call her courageous. It takes courage to insist that Canadians be given the opportunity to express their will on Canada's new Constitution.

As my leader has repeatedly said: "The Constitution belongs to the people and all Canadians should have the final say on any constitutional reform package". My leader had a vision and the courage to express that vision on this issue a little more than a year ago.