

Government Orders

However, Bill C-81 being read a third time today is a consultative piece of legislation. So, I do not think it is necessary, from a legal point of view, to specify in the bill how the results should be interpreted.

However, I must say to my colleague that the object of this exercise is to bring Quebec back into the Canadian Constitution. Consequently, if Quebecers say no, then I do not think it would be wise for a government, whichever it is, to force a view or a bill on the people.

I can understand the position of the Liberal Party of Canada in this debate. We appreciate their support for this bill, but I do not think the concerns of my colleague are justified, since C-81 is a consultative bill.

Mr. Phillip Edmonston (Chambly): I have listened with great interest to what the minister just said, Mr. Speaker. I would indeed wish to underline that the minister represents a neighbouring riding of my own. Contrary to what the Bloc Québécois member for Shefford said earlier, I admire the excellent work he does for all his constituents, both nationalists and federalists. This, to me, is highly important and needs to be underlined.

The question I would like to address to the minister is the following: the government House leader has stated that all those who vote against this kind of referendum are somehow against Canada. I know that some of my constituents oppose this referendum and likewise in the neighbouring riding represented by the minister.

An hon. member: Most of them.

Mr. Edmonston: Please, I can speak for myself. I would ask him if he can dissociate himself from these comments about his constituents, a great number of which may be against the referendum? Can he dissociate himself from the comments made about people being against Canada simply because they are opposed to the referendum.

• (1200)

Mr. Danis: Mr. Speaker, I was not here when the government House leader made his remarks, but as I understand my colleague here, he seems to be saying that if someone is against this bill in the House, that person is against Canada. I do not think one can oppose

this bill because of some technical points that are not in it; I understand that very well.

As a Quebecer, the hon. member for Chambly knows very well that we in Quebec really had a model referendum law in 1980. But my colleague also knows that in the 600 or so referendums held in the western world, about 324 in Switzerland and 300 in all the other countries, there was never legislation similar to what Quebec had in 1980. It was unusual legislation. The reason it was possible in 1980—and the Quebec legislation is undoubtedly very laudable—was that a consensus could be reached, I think. People on both sides agreed at that time that they wanted it to happen in that way. Also, they did not have what we have now: opinions on the charter.

As my colleague knows very well, we discussed the bill at length before reaching this stage. I put some direct questions—I was not on the committee, and my colleague must have done the same if he was there—to the Deputy Minister of Justice, who is in fact the government's legal adviser, and to the Minister of Justice. These people felt that we could not proceed in the same way as the Quebec Referendum Act. It would be contrary to the Charter. Governments must be responsible. A government cannot go against the advice of the Department of Justice and of those whose duty it is to advise the government. That is why we allowed some amendments in committee. We ensured that all spending in a referendum campaign, including spending by the government, would be completely open.

What my friend, the member for Shefford, just said is wrong, because he knows very well that all government spending will be public. If a referendum is held and the government decides to participate in it, the government will have to proceed as the law requires and form a committee. We are thus assured of as much openness as possible, I think, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate at third reading and support Bill C-81.

I listened very carefully to all the speakers, the members of the government as well as the members of the different opposition parties. What strikes me is the