

*Government Orders*

and better in terms of the spirit of constitution making in this country.

It is very important that we get on with this work. In our party we would like to see this committee look at more than just the process. The process is extremely important, and it has to be looked at before we can implement the content. I know that we know that, but it seems to me to be more important and more relevant if this committee had a mandate that looked not only at the process but also the content of what people want in terms of constitutional change. We can deal with both.

Once we report, especially if we have the unanimous report of the three major parties in this House, it is important that the Prime Minister of this country make a commitment that he will use it as the basis of any consultation that he undertakes on behalf of the Government of Canada on constitutional change. That did not happen last June after the special study on the Meech Lake Accord, chaired by the member for Sherbrooke. Those are important things in terms of the internal process of how we operate here in this House.

• (1620)

It is very important that we ask who speaks for Canada in this debate. Quebec is doing what Quebec is doing with the Bélanger-Campeau Commission. Manitoba is striking a special committee. There is one in Alberta. There is one in Nova Scotia. There may be others like it in Ontario, very shortly.

In terms of Canada it is important that this Parliament has a position that stands up for and defends this country. It is very important that be done. When we draft a constitution it is important that that constitution be the constitution of the people that represents the people of this country. It is not a constitution that represents only politicians and governments of this country or premiers or prime ministers.

That was the fundamental problem with the process around the Meech Lake Accord. I do not blame the Prime Minister of Canada entirely for that. The amending formula was inherited from 1981, through the then negotiations led by then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. This time, in what I consider the Canada round, we must come up with a more democratic way to amend our Constitution. We must look very seriously at the option of constituent assemblies or perhaps constitutional con-

ventions across this country where people are gathered to write their own constitution.

If we look back at the original union of this country, we see that it was more than the politicians who were involved back in the 1800s. In Philadelphia, in the United States, it had a constituent assembly, although not a very broadly based one, where the states all sent a number of delegates to negotiate on their behalf. Once it came up with what it thought was the Constitution of the United States, it went back to the various states and had vigorous debates in the various assemblies. One by one, they approved the Constitution of what became the United States of America. We must broaden that process.

We will have failed this country if we do not make a recommendation from that committee that broadens it into one form or other of a constituent assembly or constitutional conventions at some part of the process.

We must also have mandatory public hearings. We have done this fairly well in this House, but it is often after the fact. We did not have public hearings before the drafting of the accord that we call the Meech Lake Accord. We had public hearings after the drafting of the accord, and those public hearings did not travel with a committee across the country. We stayed here in Ottawa and had people come to us, rather than us go to the people, which is the wrong way around.

I hope we have learned that the Constitution belongs to the people of this country. We start with the people of this country in various parts of Canada. We build a constitution for them, with them, every single step of the way.

In that Canada of the future we have to recognize that we are a diverse country. We must build a country that is built on co-operative federalism if it is to survive. We have to recognize the uniqueness and the differences of the province of Quebec and enshrine those differences in a constitution.

Most Canadians are in agreement that Quebec is unique and different in terms of culture, language, education, communication, and immigration. It should be looked at differently in the province of Quebec. That must be accommodated, as we must accommodate the differences and the uniqueness of our first nations, the aboriginal peoples of this country, in their evolution toward self-government and in the recognition of their