

The Address

for popular involvement in this process, is an historic milestone in our evolution as a true democracy.

The Speech from the Throne advises us that we in the House will be asked to approve enabling legislation to provide for greater participation of Canadian men and women in constitutional change. Tomorrow afternoon I will table again in the House my private members' bill, the Canadian Referendum and Plebiscite Act, so that it can be considered by our Parliament in concert with this stated intention of the government.

We Canadians have been a timid democracy for the main. We owe it to ourselves to more robustly embrace our authentic experience. We owe it to ourselves to involve and to trust the people in the processes of constitution making. Our cousins in Australia have not hesitated to do this. There constitutional amendments must be ratified by the people themselves. If it is not possible to ratify, as the Australians found in eight times out of thirty-two, then if you cannot persuade a majority of the people living in the country that the proposed changes to the fundamental rules of the country are worth making then they ought not to be made.

More important even than the numbers that are added up on the night of a national referendum or plebiscite is the educational process that we go through in the campaign, that intense period of focused debate and discussion, hearing the pros and cons, the self-definition that comes, as it did to Quebecers in 1980, as it did to Prince Edward Islanders three years ago on the fixed link issue, as it did to people in the Northwest Territories on the territorial division plebiscite. This is a great opportunity for all of us to join in direct partnership with the Canadian people. For that reason also, I am very proud, as a Canadian, to be supporting this Prime Minister and this government.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his address which I found to be sensitive. I know him to be a committed parliamentarian.

As I understood the address, he attempted to answer one fundamental question: Why is Canada breaking up or on the verge of break up? Clearly, if we are not

careful, it is a possibility. Certainly we hear that a great deal throughout the whole nation.

I want to explore that very briefly. Is it because of the continued tensions between the English and French speaking people of this country? Is it because of the policy of two official languages? Is it because we have ignored for too long our aboriginal peoples, creating pressures that have become very difficult to deal with? We have been very slow in addressing them. Is it because we have been unable to accommodate those Canadians of origins other than aboriginal, French and English, who somehow feel as if they have been left on the periphery? Is it the recession? We all know that people are worried about their jobs. When we do not know what will happen tomorrow we sometimes become much more impatient and perhaps less tolerant. Is it possibly because of the breakdown of some of our east-west links? I do not say that in a partisan kind of way.

Decisions have been made with respect to VIA Rail so there is less travel, disruptions brought about by the Canada-U.S. trade agreement, and the imposition, and I understand the reasons, of the government's goods and services tax. Again I stress it is not a partisan statement. Is that contributing to this breakdown?

Perhaps just a final point, is it perhaps related to, in the final analysis, our inability to work with each other? I was rather surprised by a comment of the member for Yorkton—Melville, who said that my leader had indicated that he was against a constituent assembly. I found that really surprising because I had been the one who had explained to him what my leader had said which was very simply: "Here is what I would prefer, a parliamentary committee putting forth a package, consulting with Canadians, and then a referendum". He did say, and I heard him publicly, if a constituent assembly will do better work than a parliamentary committee, if it can be decided whether it should be elected or selected, how large it should be, what its mandate should be, then he is quite prepared to look at it.

Is it because in the final analysis, when it comes down to the fundamentals, that we cannot in fact reach out and work out a solution that is the best for the country and the best for all Canadians.