

Government Orders

Mr. Mulroney: Canadian citizenship brings extraordinary benefits to us all, whatever language we speak and wherever we happen to live. We have built on the northern half of this continent one of the most civil countries in the world. Our system of justice, which guarantees equality before the law, is widely respected around the world.

With a population of only 26 million people, we have overcome what is in many instances a very forbidding climate and geography to build the seventh largest economy in the industrialized world and the eighth largest economy in the entire world. This is a remarkable accomplishment for a small nation which has become one of the great trading nations of the entire world, 30 per cent of whose national wealth depends on our capacity to trade successfully into international markets.

While many countries struggle just to put bread on the table for their citizens, Canadians continue to enjoy, despite our economic problems, a broad range of social services and one of the best standards of living in the world.

Canada enjoys substantial international influence and respect as a middle power. We are the only country that is a member of the G-7, of the Commonwealth, and of the *Sommet de la francophonie*. Indeed Canada was a founding member of the Commonwealth and of the *Sommet de la francophonie*. I think that the Commonwealth and the *Sommet de la francophonie* reflect both our opportunities and the cultural and linguistic realities of Canada. It is a tribute to all members of the House that both of these very important international organizations are soundly supported by members of all parties. Canada has moved along, and those are things we have accomplished together.

Millions of people all over the world are lining up today to come to Canada because successive generations of Canadians have succeeded in building not a perfect society, God knows, but an open, democratic, peaceful, and very prosperous country. That is what we now have, and that is what we risk losing.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, before you is an assembly of legislators, men and women who have a duty to adopt laws to ensure the unity and prosperity of our country. But above all, we

are trustees of the hopes and aspirations of our fellow citizens. Our responsibility is to give Canadians a Constitution that reflects pride in their history and confidence in the future.

[English]

The Special Joint Committee will consult broadly with Canadians on the process for amending the Constitution of Canada. In particular, the committee will be asked to consult with Canadians on the role of the Canadian public in the process, on the effectiveness of the existing process for securing constitutional amendments, on alternatives to the current process. To fulfil its mandate, the committee will have the power to travel and hold public hearings across Canada.

The government has prepared a discussion paper entitled *Amending the Constitution of Canada* to assist public discussion of this important matter. The document reviews how the current process has operated since 1982 and is designed to stimulate discussion of key questions including public participation and alternatives to improve the framework that we now have.

If we are to devise a better process, a number of questions are simply going to have to be addressed very bluntly. At what stage in the process does it make sense for the public to involve itself: at the very outset, once agreement in principle has been reached among governments or, later, when agreement has been reached on the legal text of a proposed amendment?

How should groups or involved citizens, who now under the Constitution have no formal role in the amending process but who quite properly see themselves as very important stakeholders, seek to be involved in an effective and productive way?

Are the current time periods for adoption of amendments to the Canadian Constitution too long, considering that over the periods allowed elections can and do occur, governments can and do change and extraneous issues may intrude so as to derail the ratification process itself? How long can a country keep going with a process that is clearly beyond in many ways the capacity of human beings to deal with effectively?

Governments do change and always will change. We have 11 of them in Canada that are tied into the amending process. In the normal course of events one