

The Constitution

● (2110)

This is where I chastise some members of the House, Mr. Speaker. Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act which establishes criteria whereby Indian women are arbitrarily discriminated against has never really been an issue close to the members of this chamber, with the exception of a few, even though it was a blatant example of discrimination. The provisions of our new constitution will not allow such unjust treatment to continue. It is true that there is a period of transition; but the important point to remember is that such an injustice will not have the opportunity to reappear.

For those members who are shaking their heads, may I say that the women of this Parliament took matters in hand last spring and crossed party lines to make a statement saying they did not endorse it. Since then I believe that 42 bands have rescinded that part of the act. I am very proud of them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Erola: I should add that all the women in this Parliament participated in the activity of this committee and signed the declaration.

A guarantee of fundamental rights and freedoms can do nothing less than make us stronger; stronger as a nation and stronger as a people. If a government is to be judged by those whom it governs, and well it should, one of the main criteria for evaluation must undoubtedly be freedom. The best government is that which provides the maximum freedom for the individual. This document provides the Canadian people with a guarantee of that freedom.

Since the release of this proposal we have heard ominous statements of gloom and impending doom. There is concern in some provincial capitals that certain clauses of the new constitution will deprive them of their protectionist attitudes and practices. To this argument I can only say that this is Canada; we do not require internal passports in this country or papers and dossiers to travel from region to region, to work in one part or the other. This is Canada, a free land; a land where every Canadian is given the choice to choose his or her residence, occupation and lifestyle.

I have been behind the Iron Curtain where checkpoints are established on all access roads to cities to control the movement, not just of visitors, but of their own people. They do not enjoy freedom of mobility. To deprive our citizens of their freedom to live and work unhindered in any region of Canada is clearly an unacceptable option. Democracy demands better.

As a mother of two young people and through my contact with other young people, I am continually encouraged by their openness and candour. Something that young Canadians have done a great deal of—and I applaud them for it—is travelling. Every summer we see them on the road, from Newfoundland to British Columbia, discovering their country—discovering places in which they might like to live and work in the future. It is difficult to explain to them the artificial barriers to their mobility that have been created by narrow regionalism.

I met with several senior mining industry officials in Ottawa over a week ago and the first thing that they commented on to me was the importance of the mobility clause to the future of the mining industry. Unfortunately it seems that some of the provincial premiers—and some hon. members opposite—think industry can operate in a vacuum. I must inform them that it cannot.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I think I should read from a brief they presented to me, part of which they will be presenting this weekend to the conference of mines ministers in Halifax. The brief states, in part, as follows:

There is no doubt that Canadian unity is being seriously eroded, not only by the continuing dispute between governments over the distribution of powers, but also by the economic barriers that the provinces are setting up against each other. This contributes to the fragmentation of the Canadian common market and impedes the movement of capital, labour and products. Further, the climate of uncertainty thus created has affected business decisions. The result is to raise the cost of doing business in Canada, making it less attractive to new investment, both domestic and foreign, at the very time when massive amounts of capital are required to finance the many major projects which this country needs if it is to fulfil its destiny.

They went further, to urge all governments to give earnest consideration to these concerns which are shared by all productive sectors of the country.

Ultimately, the decisions on the future of this country will be made by the people. It is the people who will choose a formula for future amendment if the first ministers fail to reach an agreement. It is the people whose rights and freedoms are being protected, and therefore it is the people who must be the final authority. The people of Canada deserve and want a Canadian constitution, not a constitution that is an act of the British House of Commons. This last remnant of colonialism is an embarrassment to Canada and to many Canadians. Are we not a mature enough democracy to be trusted with our own constitution? Can we not be trusted to responsibly protect the rights of all Canadians?

I am a proud Canadian; the people of northern Ontario are also proud Canadians. The people of northern Ontario, like most of the people in this country, want to see action now—for us, for our children, for their children and for all future Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): The hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle).

Is the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall) rising on a point of order?

Mr. Forrestall: I should like to ask the hon. member a question, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): The hon. member for Prince George-Peace River.

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker, by now the phrases, “constitutional reform”, “renewed federalism”, “amending formula” and “charter of rights” must be etched in the minds and souls of many Canadians. But most