

*Government Orders*

For many years I thought that the use of the referendum would be too simplistic but I began to believe more and more that Canada has got itself into a trap of thinking that the only deals that really could be made, that really counted, or that would last are deals made among the elite groups of the country. There is a whole academic body of literature about making deals this way, elite accommodation for those of you who follow these academic issues.

It became quite apparent in the 1970s and 1980s that the deals being made by these elite have not been respected in the Canadian political body. Through the emergence of fringe parties, through the emergence of protest votes and tax revolts, Canadians have sought many ways to express their frustration with the system.

I concluded it was about time that Parliament began to take leadership on the fundamental question of how to democratize society.

The Meech Lake accord, which failed two years ago, failed in part because a small group thought that the solution it had thought about and worked hard at should be accepted automatically by the rest of the country. The ensuing public debate was one of the more divisive debates we have had on the Constitution or any other issue in this country.

Part of what we are doing on the constitutional debate is a healing process. We are trying to find ways in which the different regions can be accommodated, the different provincial interests can be accommodated, and the bottom line that the Canadian taxpayer, the people living in this country, feel that in the end there is a package we can put behind us and move on to more important issues.

The deal has to be accepted widely.

The referendum offers the possibility of opening up the doors and saying to people that here is the question that Parliament has thought about and put in front of you and what we want you to do is indicate that you support or disapprove what has been done.

There is a risk because we want to make sure that Canadians see the country continue. Whenever you have a plebiscite or a referendum on an issue of such

importance there is a risk. However, the risk of not putting a question out is greater.

There is the risk of having people sitting at home saying: "There they go again. They never ask me my opinion. I do not know what they are doing. I do not know what the Constitution is". This is one of those rare opportunities when we can say: "You are part of the process. Here is what all the negotiations have led to. Here is the package. We want your approval. If you do not approve it, we start over again and we form a package that is acceptable to you".

That is a very fundamental shift away from traditional parliamentary democracy. The fact that this legislation is flawed is very important to consider because its acceptance will mark in the development of our parliamentary history the time in which we moved away from this Chamber as the place of final resolution of issues into a more broadly defined consensus and voting process.

It will not be something that evolves on every issue, but I think that the acceptance of the referendum here for the first time in many years across the country is an acknowledgement that the process must change to accommodate people. I look forward to participating in that change and to putting my support behind those who wish to have a referendum.

The Liberal Party worked at this issue since the failure of the Meech Lake accord and realized that only through broad based support could a new constitutional deal be accepted. That is why in the nine points that we introduced into the debate in April 1991 we had the referendum front and centre. It has taken a while for the deal makers to see the need to include others.

The introduction of this legislation was greatly welcomed by our party because we have been waiting for a chance to have Canadians express their views. I would particularly like to use this opportunity to thank the member from Etobicoke who spent long years—we were colleagues in Carleton University many years ago—seeing his ideas develop and emerge, and seeing him take a perspective. Very gently and gradually through research and persuasion, he has had the House of Commons turn to his idea in the end and say: "Yes, you were on the right track long before the rest of us. Thank you very much for presenting us with an option".