

*Government Orders*

required under section 43 of our Constitution Act to make this an amendment to the Constitution of Canada.

The process has been open, consultative and supported by the people and the legislature of the province of New Brunswick. Of course the resolution applies only to the province of New Brunswick.

The second point I would like to make on why we should be supporting this today is its substance. It is right and just to make sure we have equality between the two linguistic communities in that province. It is an act of generosity, an act of tolerance, an act that reflects our history that we have in this country as a whole two linguistic communities.

New Brunswick is really a microcosm of Canada. One-third of New Brunswickers are francophones and about two-thirds are anglophones. In order for the community to survive and thrive, the equality of those two communities should be enshrined in our Constitution. Our party has always supported minority language rights, openness, generosity and tolerance when it comes to the two languages in this country. I am very proud to be supporting this amendment to the Constitution of Canada on behalf of our party.

I want to conclude by briefly making a couple of more points. The first is that we are doing this in the proper way. In 1981 we had about four or five ways agreed upon at that time on how to amend our Constitution. One way was through unanimous consent for about five different items. The major way was with the support of two-thirds of the provinces, with 50 per cent of the population residing in the province and with the support of Parliament. That was the bulk of the amendments to our Constitution. That was the bulk of Charlottetown.

The third way was a bilateral way where the amendment affects one or more provinces but not all provinces. It had to be passed by the legislatures of those provinces and by the Parliament of Canada, under section 43 of the Constitution of Canada. It is interesting that section 43(b) also refers directly to language issues. It states: "Any amendment to any provision that relates to the use of the English or French language within a province".

What we are doing here is precisely what is called for in terms of the Constitution of Canada as patriated by then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

• (1040)

That leads me to my last two points. There is a concern by some people that maybe what we are doing here is introducing something new called collective rights. I just want to say that line of thinking is absolutely wrong. We already have in our Constitution many times references to collective rights of people, linguistic rights in terms of the French language and English language all across this country. We have in section 16 of the Constitution the listing of those rights. We also have in section 23 guarantees for official language minorities. Be they English in Quebec for education or the francophones outside Quebec for education, those are collective rights. They are already in the Constitution of Canada.

In addition to linguistic rights and educational rights, we have rights for the aboriginal people that are already part of the Constitution of this country. In addition to that we have rights in Canada for people who come from many different multicultural and multiracial backgrounds. I suppose we could even say that under section 36 we have certain economic obligations of the federal government to provide equalization and regional development plans to help poor provinces, and again that helps collectivities in the poorer parts of the country.

Any challenge to what we are doing today is a very shallow challenge. It reflects people who go back to the 19th century and think the only rights that are important are individual rights. That is a very reactionary thing of the past and something we should be turning down as Canadians. This is a very positive, progressive amendment to the Constitution. It is in sync with what we have done before. It is an extension of what we have done before.

The last point I want to make before I sit down is that I do sometimes worry about the future of this country. I want to say at this time I know that the minister himself worries about the future of this country. The Minister Responsible for the Constitutional Affairs has done many months of very fine work in trying to build a national consensus. It is not just the minister; indeed many people in this House and many of the provincial political leaders across the country have worked hard. That consensus did not achieve fruition. We saw the results of the October 26 referendum.