

Summer Recess

ing to gag Parliament. How can we gag someone who has nothing to say? Also he quoted the Postmaster General (Mr. Ouellet) as saying that it is time to go on holidays. That is not what the Postmaster General said. He said what I have been saying this evening, that is, how important it is for us to work in our constituencies.

I should like to take this occasion to recommend one more thing. When Parliament rises, I recommend that its break coincides with the school break which is normally in July and August. My recommendation would be that that is when the House should rise. We do not need three months; two months would suffice. At least we would be assured of that time to spend with our families. We would show the example that we should show as fathers and mothers, and we would be more effective when we returned.

When we all return on October 14, hopefully we will all have done some soul searching. Perhaps I will have to change my attitude. If so, I certainly will. We should all come back with more positive attitudes so that we can work more effectively and constructively. One group of people will benefit if we do that, that is all Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bert Hargrave (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few comments in this adjournment debate which reflect upon how the last nine months are viewed by my constituents, by myself and, more generally, by the western prairies, especially southern Alberta which reacted as we did to the federal political scene of the last nine months. I suggest there are two interlocking issues which have dominated the scene, not only in Parliament but all across Canada. I am referring to the Constitution and the energy issues. It is appropriate that I make some remarks about these two issues and their impact upon my constituency and, in general, upon southern Alberta. Then I should like to relate them to the approximately 100-year history of southern Alberta and generally of western Canada.

Most of us remember 1967 when we celebrated with almost a spontaneous enthusiasm our one hundredth anniversary as a nation; it was our centennial. I am sure some hon. members and their children went to Montreal for that special birthday party, Expo '67. I was privileged and pleased to do so. As a nation we were on an enormously great high and possibly more united than ever before in our history.

A decade later we all lived through and survived the trauma which ensued when one of our ten provinces, Quebec, proposed to separate, and our remaining nine provinces and especially the federal government went to great lengths to try to convince Quebec people to remain in confederation. But today, just after our one hundred and fourteenth anniversary as a nation, we are more divided than at any time in our history. Why? How could we go from the 1967 high to the critical and even desperate state of affairs today? I think it is a fair question which we should all ask each other. It is not easy to explain because there are a number of complex and historical factors involved.

For instance, the three prairie provinces were created in 1905 without the legal right of ownership of our lands, including natural resources. During the first 25 years we were so busy keeping out of debt that we never even missed the ownership right, at least until the dirty thirties came along and out of sheer desperation those rights were returned to us. It is ironic that the same natural resources of oil, gas, coal and, most important, our fertile soil and fresh water, add to the complexity because of an incredible national preoccupation with energy and the economic crisis today.

Suffice it to say, the three prairie provinces have experienced a dramatic change. They have evolved from have not to have provinces. Central Canada, Ontario and Quebec have difficulty accepting this readjustment in Canadian history. The politics of this readjustment hit home with a resounding shock wave at 8 p.m. on election night, February 18, 1980, when we switched on our radios and televisions in western Canada to hear that the political decisions had already been decided by just two provinces, Quebec and Ontario, before our western votes had even begun to be counted. We will never forget that moment.

I should like to refer to the constitutional issue. Last October 1980, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) announced his intention to have the government patriate the Constitution in a very specific and new approach. This subject was not an election issue or campaign promise of any party. In those early weeks there was an indication of broad public support to bring home our own Constitution, the British North America Act. Most of us need to be reminded that the BNA Act was formulated here in Canada, by Canadians, under the leadership of Sir John A. Macdonald and it was kept, by our choice, by the British Imperial Parliament. It was kept there to be amended from time to time at our direction. While there is widespread public support to bring it home, we are clearly divided on the proposed process to bring it here. Most of us are deeply concerned about the indecent haste to have our Constitution amended before it leaves Britain and about the unilateral aspects of the patriation, specifically that none of our provinces should be consulted or should be allowed to participate in the process. The only explanation which this Parliament and this nation have ever been offered for this haste was to carry out the Prime Minister's promise to Quebec during the referendum campaign.

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In my opinion it is a combination of the Constitution and energy issues which appear to be dividing our nation today, certainly in western Canada. Certainly, 20 per cent interest rates and record inflation which show no sign of abatement will not help solve our troubles.

I suggest there is another aspect which should be mentioned and not overlooked, especially by us in western Canada. I ask hon. members to reflect on the make-up of our population in western Canada today. I want the House to consider that over 100 years have elapsed since the west began to be settled. Essentially the make-up of the west is the end result of three