

Government Orders

Also, I regret, Mr. Speaker, that once again there is no representative from the Yukon or the Northwest Territories, one-third of Canada's land mass. I would like to say that there is a particular point of view from the north that I feel should be represented in such a constitutional committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, long before I became leader of my party, I was talking about opening up the constitutional decision-making process. As a Northerner, I was always frustrated at the governments that refused to consult us, that acted as if Northerners did not exist.

[English]

Therefore, it is regrettable, Mr. Speaker, that there was no one from the Yukon or the Northwest Territories on this commission. I would ask the Prime Minister if he would reconsider that and consider someone from the north to be included in this commission. The Constitution building of this country clearly must become an inclusive process. A constitution cannot simply meet a legal test but must indeed meet the test of the people for whom that constitution and with whom that constitution is formed.

• (1620)

Last June I raised the idea in this House of a constituent assembly on the Constitution.

[Translation]

I was commenting that Canada needs such a renewal. Aboriginal people, women, labour, business and religious groups, as well as intellectuals must have their say on the Constitution we are creating.

[English]

I am pleased that at least this is a beginning on that idea which I presented last spring. There is more to the unity of Canada than a constitution. I want to remind Canadians that it is this Prime Minister who appointed eight GST senators to the Senate and who now says that he wants to see it change in those institutions, as does the New Democratic Party. That is why we have initiated a committee of the New Democratic Party on reform of parliamentary institutions.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, it is this Prime Minister who totally ignores the opinion of most people and refuses to withdraw the GST. He does not have a good reputation when it comes to listening and consulting.

[English]

I hope this will be a change, but I say again that the unity of the country is just not found only in a constitution. When people from outside the country look at our country, they often judge it on three characteristics: the rich culture and language of Quebec; aboriginal people, the First Nations of our country and; the north and the territories.

It is exactly on those three areas that we in Canada have failed to come together. That must be the challenge for this committee and for all Canadians. It is not sufficient just simply to have a committee of eminent persons—whom I am sure will work very hard and do a good job—but it is not just enough to have a committee that goes out to speak to Canadians. If we are truly to work for Canadian unity, we have to continue to find ways for Canadians to dialogue with each other.

One of the fundamental problems that we have in Canada is that in this diverse country due to the distances between communities, the people in Newfoundland often do not know the people of the Northwest Territories, the people in British Columbia, the people in Quebec and so on. We have to find ways in order to also bring about that kind of unity. There are many ways that one can do that. One can do that through communications systems.

It is ironic that at the same time that the Prime Minister is standing before us in this House and saying that he wants to work for the unity of Canada—and I believe him—at the same time there is a communications bill before this House that says that the CBC will no longer have a mandate to promote national unity. Let us have some consistency here, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Ms. McLaughlin: If the Prime Minister is serious about making his government open and honest, he should create a parliamentary committee on the Constitution and submit the commission's report to the committee for review.