

The Constitution

● (2120)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bockstael (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, since the draft resolution was tabled in the House we have been engaged in an historic debate that will bring out the fundamental principles on which our parliamentary and federal democratic institutions are based. All during the constitutional talks of the debates in the House, we have been accused by certain provincial premiers and members of the opposition of seeking to destroy our system of government. They have accused us of wanting to reduce the powers of the provinces and increase those of the federal government.

Now that we have tabled a motion for closure in order to refer the resolution to a joint committee for further study, we are being accused of abusing our parliamentary and democratic principles. I would ask how these same members of the opposition can oppose a resolution encompassing the fundamental principles on which the democratic values of our parliamentary system and our federal institutions are based. Mr. Speaker, I wonder how, in all good faith toward their constituents, these elected representatives can oppose a resolution which would entrench in the Constitution the fundamental rights and freedom to which every Canadian citizen is entitled. And finally, Mr. Speaker, I wonder how these same representatives can deny those who elected them, their fellow Canadians, the rights and freedoms associated with mobility, of working wherever they wish in the country, the right to instruction in their mother tongue, or any other right of freedom belonging to them as citizens of a sovereign and democratic federation.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Progressive Conservative members are toying with the fundamental and individual rights of Canadians. They are manipulating the resolution and motion for closure for their own political good, with no respect for the electorate or for the House. And then they accuse us of wishing to cut off debate without giving them sufficient opportunity to express their opinion on the motion tabled in the House on October 6.

Mr. Speaker, if in the two and a half weeks they have been unable to mount an opposition to the motion tabled by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) it is because they did not know how to, not because they had insufficient time. We on this side of the House realize the importance of this resolution. We have decided that it is time to refer this resolution to a committee for further study. And that is why we have tabled a motion for closure in the House. In deciding to invoke this historic closure procedure, our purpose was not to cut off debate but rather to study this resolution more carefully in committee and give the House an opportunity to turn its attention to other pressing issues.

[English]

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus on some of the comments which have been made over the course of the last few months and in the constitutional debates in the House.

Throughout these talks and debates, we have heard cries from certain provincial premiers, and from members opposite, that the federal government is alienating western Canadians. Just the other day, the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) openly stated in the House that western Canadians were feeling deeply alienated. Well, I am a western Canadian. I represent a riding in Manitoba which borders on the Provencher riding represented by my hon. friend opposite, and I certainly do not sense that deep feeling of alienation.

Rather, I would suggest that some western Canadian premiers who are not really speaking for the majority of their citizens have been alienating themselves from their own regions and from their own ridings.

I personally applaud our government for the concessions it recently proposed in the way of resource control. I truthfully believe that these concessions will be welcomed by western Canadians and are much in line with what they have been seeking for many years, in terms of guarantees.

The last decade has been one of prosperity for the western Canadian provinces. Once almost entirely dependent on agriculture, the prairie provinces have experienced new forms of economic growth which have enabled them to diversify and industrialize their economies around new resources. These new developments have greatly changed the economic and political balance of confederation in a way never yet experienced in our history. This change should not lead us to western alienation, an image members opposite are forever conjuring, but to a new partnership between the regions and provinces in a unified country. I believe this attitude should be welcomed by all Canadians.

Because of the economic boom in western Canada, we as a nation are today much stronger, much more able to cope with international tensions such as those which prevail in the world oil market. Just as the national policy of 1879 strengthened our country and enabled us to counter external political and economic encroachments, our newly-found wealth in hydrocarbon resources has, on the one hand, served to reaffirm this union, and on the other, has led to a much better redistribution of wealth throughout the country.

Interprovincial migration from eastern to western Canada has been remarkable. I think that all westerners should welcome those fellow Canadians who come to western Canada in search of employment and the opportunity to start a new life in a region where such opportunities are plentiful. There is a lot to be said about the entrenchment of mobility rights in the constitution, and especially on the part of provinces experiencing financial difficulties.

If economic growth in the west brings about a movement of people to that region, then, no doubt, some of these new settlers will be from Quebec, in much the same way as the French Canadians came to the west, more than a century ago.