

Adjournment Debate

on taxes on their old age pensions or the debate on the GST. In fact, the public feels that the members of Parliament were saying: "We know better than you do what is good for you". Therefore, the public feels that their views were not being represented.

That concern reinforced the feeling that grew out of Meech Lake that things were being done privately behind closed doors and not in an open fashion whatsoever. From here on in it is important that everything be done publicly. If there are compromises and trade-offs to be made, the public understands what the basis of those trade-offs are all about.

A recent poll, as you know Mr. Speaker, found that 60 per cent of Canadians think that the government is just playing politics by introducing these constitutional proposals and 51 per cent, slightly higher in Quebec, believe that these proposals should finally be approved by a national referendum.

Tonight I want to ask the parliamentary secretary if he is going to assure us that the final constitutional proposals are going to be put to a national referendum by the government for final approval or rejection by all Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre H. Vincent (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, on May 28, 1991, the hon. member from Don Valley East asked that the Government of Canada give its undertaking to accept, without modification, parliamentary recommendations on the constitution. He also asked that the Government promise to deal with the entire issue in an open way.

Mr. Speaker, this government has made a commitment that I will repeat for the record: in cooperation with the people and Parliament of Canada, together with the provinces, the Government of Canada will seek an open constitutional covenant in an open fashion.

The Special Joint Committee will listen to the views of interested groups and individual Canadians on how to improve our constitution in the course of its broad hearings from coast to coast. However, both Houses will wish to know the views of the provincial legislatures which, Mr. Speaker, also represent the people of Canada, and which play a formal role, as we know, in

authorizing constitutional amendments. Under these circumstances, it would be inappropriate for us to close doors prematurely on the process of improving our constitution.

If we hope to embark on a truly open process, Mr. Speaker, we must expand, rather than curtail, the participation of other groups and individuals in this process. To exclude everyone but the members of this assembly would run directly counter to the goal of democratizing the system of altering our constitution. That is why the work of the Special Joint Committee is essential in developing a national consensus.

Mr. Speaker, it is the people of Canada, expressing themselves through the House of Commons, their provincial legislatures, and as individuals, who will ultimately decide the content of their own constitution.

I encourage the honourable member from Don Valley East to play an active role in this process in the months to come. This House will still have the final word on any new constitutional covenant, according to the rules of our current Constitution.

[English]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to follow up on a matter raised in a question on June 17, 1991 in connection with Corrections Canada put to the Solicitor General.

At that time there was some fear that a strike might take place within Corrections Canada in a way that would cause security problems in our corrections institutions. Fortunately that type of a strike or withdrawal of services did not occur. Consequently the fear that we would have significant problems, while not unfounded, we can file in the past. However, a number of issues lying behind the question remained.

Coincidentally just yesterday I visited the Edmonton Institution in Edmonton, Alberta, a maximum security institution, where issues relating to that question were taken up with management and employees. Also coincidentally this morning the government has put a new bill before Parliament respecting a new Corrections Act and also dealing with a number of issues related to that area.