

Constitution of Canada

In closing I wish to say that I am sure this committee will know how to serve the best interests of the whole population. We must maintain this committee while trying to improve it, because in some respects it does not seem to be equal to the task. I find that too much restraint—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I must remind the hon. member that the matter before us is to decide whether the members of the Committee on the Constitution should be granted the public funds they need to travel across Canada.

I do not think it is appropriate at the present time to reconsider whether the committee should exist, whether we should have a new constitution and how it should be adopted. It seems to me those matters extend far beyond the limited motion now before the House. If the Chair allows hon. members to engage in a substantial debate on amendments to the constitution, we will not get through the debate today.

● (2:40 p.m.)

I therefore suggest to the hon. member for Lapointe, who now has the floor, and to other hon. members who will perhaps want to participate in this debate that, for the efficiency of our proceedings, we should keep to the motion now under study.

Mr. Marceau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I think this warning is quite appropriate and I will merely close my remarks by saying that I wholly favour granting the funds required for the members of this committee to travel throughout the province but such funds should obviously be limited and controlled. Of course, when I said throughout the province I meant—

An hon. Member: Throughout Canada.

Mr. Marceau: —of course, throughout our wide country since, in my opinion, we should be aware of the problems facing the province of Quebec as well as those in other parts of Canada.

Therefore I approve the whole resolution while I admit that we cannot allow that unduly large sums be affected for that purpose. Although I believe the appropriation is justified, control should be kept over those funds in order to ensure that they be really used for the purpose we are proposing: a better constitution for Canadians.

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, being very interested in the make-up of this committee and conscious of its importance, I cannot help but add a few observations on the funds that must be allotted to this committee for a lot of reasons.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, it is not a question of discussing, as you said a while ago. It is not a question of any hon. member doubting the importance of this committee. It is rather a question of establishing its responsibilities. It seems clear to us that Parliament must be able to initiate any decision. I think that this is why some of my colleagues have expressed certain opinions.

I acknowledge, as has been done by many other members, that Parliament must necessarily dictate to committees, rather than be satisfied with the committee's report following its visits.

It seems quite clear to me that some kind of itinerary should be submitted here. Furthermore, this House should allow the committee to hold sittings in the major communities of Canada where representations might be made by local citizens to the benefit of the committee. This committee assuredly needs the support of public funds if it is to collect the best information available all over Canada. Its reports will then be based on information obtained from direct sources.

I am somewhat concerned by the opinion of the hon. member for Shefford (Mr. Rondeau) that the time is not ripe for the House to invite the committee to tour Canada. I believe that the deep dissatisfaction that exists in certain regions justifies the urgent government allocation of the funds the committee needs to start work as soon as possible.

● (2:50 p.m.)

According to that hon. member, that would amount to giving a chance to revolutionaries. The time has come for us to do something. We have shown enough tolerance with respect to certain freedoms. The government, in the present context, has not only the power, but the duty to take categorical decisions.

It is not by keeping silent, by holding this silence kept for too long, that the dangers facing us will be checked. To the contrary, all hon. members must support the establishment of that committee, in order that it may be given the necessary funds and that it may quickly report to Parliament. Then the latter will have to act as rapidly and introduce either amendments to the constitution or a new constitution altogether. It needs badly to be brought up to date.

With the appropriations available to the committee, it will be possible to come up with a constitution which will take into consideration the particularities found everywhere in Canada and not only in Quebec. Due to the serious efforts which will be made, this constitution will allow Quebec to anticipate the future within a federal system, with the necessary guarantees.

There is no need to mention that the committee has only to look up the documents submitted during the federal-provincial conferences for the past ten years to know exactly what Quebec's needs are. Such visits everywhere in Canada will make it possible for this committee to become fully aware of existing differences. The committee must get the funds it needs to study problems in the field and, having secured all the necessary information, I hope that in a year from now they will propose a constitution through which the freedoms of each individual are respected, and the needs of every province are recognized. We can then build something lasting, that will enable us, to face the future with much more hope and satisfaction than we can today.

Mr. Speaker: If the minister speaks now, he will close the debate.