

maritimes must say yes and Quebec as well. This is not only a matter of vision but also a way to avoid the kind of situation that caused the demise of Meech Lake, when a single First Minister, because he refused to sign his name, prevented the Constitution from being amended and Quebec from turning to the constitutional fold.

We could have the same situation if a First Minister were to say: "I am committed to respecting the decision of my province in a referendum". In that case, we might get the same result as we did after Meech, which means Quebec would not be able to go after its veto, with all the consequences that would entail.

I had a second amendment I wanted the House of Commons to approve. It was about spending ceilings which would ensure that yes committees or no committees would never have an undue advantage over each other, based on the funds available to each side.

I would refer to it as an inequity situation in a referendum. That is the context in which I first tabled amendments for consideration before the legislative committee, amendments not unlike many that were considered at the time of the 1980 referendum in Quebec. Then I tabled the same amendments before this House so that they could be disposed of. Our Speaker ruled that the amendments—not just mine, but those of opposition members as well; there were five in all along that line—were out of order in that they went beyond the scope of the bill. And there is no going back on this ruling of the Speaker.

There is nothing stopping our Prime Minister or opposition leaders from giving the people of Canada the assurance that the Canadian majority will not decide for Quebec. Nothing is stopping our Prime Minister and opposition leaders from making such commitments.

On the other hand, votes were taken in this House yesterday on the amendments relating to the ceiling on expenditures as well as and the yes and no umbrellas and these were defeated. One hundred and eleven members voted against and 68 for the amendment I had tabled to ensure that, if a referendum were to be held in Canada, it would be the fairest possible. That being said, I suggest that democracy means allowing a member to put forward

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proposals to amend a bill and letting his colleagues decide, based on their own knowledge and conscience.

In that context, what is in the best interest of Canada? Indeed, we may decide we would rather have no bill than to have one that is flawed. In that case, what would happen? The result would be that, in the event of a constitutional impasse, we would be stuck. I maintain that we are better off with a flawed piece of legislation than to have no way of consulting the people of Canada in the event of an impasse.

**Mr. Plamondon:** That is no piece of legislation. It is a hold-up on democracy.

**An hon. member:** There are two peoples in Canada.

**An hon. member:** It is not worth it. It is a waste of money.

**Mr. Blackburn (Jonquière):** Moreover, if we do not have a referendum act, the people of Canada could well be the first to criticize us the most sharply for having failed, as members of Parliament, to afford them protection in the event of an impasse. And that is our duty as parliamentarians.

I could rise in this House tonight—as a matter of fact it would look good if Jean-Pierre Blackburn rose and voted no—and vote against this bill because it does not provide for a ceiling on expenditures as I hoped it would. It would look good—

Our hon. friend will get a chance to speak in a moment, if he would just wait his turn. It would look good indeed. But would it be the responsible thing to do?

I sat on the Beaudoin-Edwards committee where members of this House did recommend that there be a referendum act. Later, the Beaudoin-Dobbie committee recommended the same thing. In that context, we do need a referendum act. We do because of the threat of an impasse. That is also why I intend to support the principle of this referendum bill, as imperfect as it may be, as I did by the way in second reading. Unlike the members from the Bloc Québécois, however, I suited my action to my words. I tabled amendments and attended the legislative committee for that purpose. Yesterday evening, my hon. colleagues had the opportunity—