

The Constitution

negotiations would require ratification by seven legislatures representing all of the regions of Canada, one of which must be the province of Quebec, and by the Parliament of Canada. Having obtained such ratification, these proposals would then constitute law and would then constitute Canada's constitution.

I guess it is too late for the government to do that now. We just wish they had listened and taken that into account and considered doing it.

I want to close my remarks with some final thoughts on the whole matter. However, allow me first to complete my remarks in terms of whether or not we are following the best method. I do not disagree with what the government wants to do; I do disagree with some of the ways in which the government proposes to do it. We are being asked to have the parliament of the United Kingdom pass an act which has the force of law in Canada. It seems to me that one thing you do not do is allow one legislative body and government to set the rules for the structure of executive powers which are to reside somewhere else.

As a result of the Quebec referendum, the government—and I understand this—has chosen to move quickly, albeit unilaterally, in order to try to satisfy the people in Quebec, as well as all the rest of Canada, who want to have their constitution brought home. Yet the action being taken by the government has been rejected by the people in Quebec, certainly by Mr. Lévesque and by Mr. Ryan. This should give the government pause and cause it to be even more favourably disposed to receive and accept amendments from members on this side of the House as well as amendments from its own side.

When any one of us from any party presents a case, a point, a suggestion or an amendment, it should be received and considered in good faith as being sincerely and honestly meant, in the most open, positive and most favourable way possible by all other members of this House and of the committee.

I close by saying that the government having made the decision it has made—and it has the right to make the decision in terms of how the government wishes to proceed—this Parliament has the opportunity to bring about an accomplishment which could be heralded, remembered and spoken about for the next 200 years. We have that opportunity, provided we all deal with this together in a spirit of co-operation. If we do not deal with this in that manner so that it will be something spoken of and remembered and recognized for the next 200 years, we will not have done our job very well. We will have let down our country and our people.

We do well to remember and think about our original peoples and all they have done over these thousands of years; we might all think about and remember *les habitants* and all they have done since they came to this country and pioneered in the Atlantic and Quebec regions and then in the west. Think about all those who came since then—the English-speaking peoples, the peoples of many other races and cultures, who settled this country. I invite my compatriots here to consider, too, what some others have done. Specifically, I want to tell my hon. friends in this chamber about one of the most moving

experiences of my life. It occurred when I visited a cemetery in Adagem, which is in northern Belgium. There were 980 Canadians aged 19 to 30 buried there. They were from the Regina Rifles Regiment, the South Saskatchewan Regiment and the Royal 22nd Regiment, the Van Doos. There were the names of French and English Canadians alongside Polish, Ukrainian and German names. When all of us are carrying on this debate, deciding on how to conduct and address ourselves to succeeding generations, let us remember all of those and make sure that what they have done has not been for naught.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1550)

Mr. Ron Irwin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Mr. Speaker, that was a very moving finish to a very eloquent speech. It is indeed an honour to be here today to address what is a very important resolution not only to this House but to the country, a resolution which will ultimately patriate our constitution for the last time, which will entrench a charter of rights and give us an amending procedure.

It is my hope that this matter will soon go to the committee of the House and the Senate so that it can be expeditiously dealt with at the committee level and a joint address sent to England and the Queen before Christmas. It is unfortunate that a group of premiers have decided to take us to court, but not unexpected. The premiers of this country have been looked after by a successive number of federal parliaments. It is about time we started to look after the country. I am going to quote a lot of Conservatives. In 1865, Sir John A. Macdonald made a very profound observation. He said:

We have strengthened the general government. We have given the general legislature all the great subjects of legislation. We have conferred on them, not only specifically and in detail, all the powers which are incident to sovereignty, but we have expressly declared that all subjects of general interest not distinctly and exclusively conferred upon the local governments and local legislatures shall be conferred upon the general government and legislature. We have thus avoided that great source of weakness which has been the cause of the disruption of the United States.

In the ensuing 115 years, through judicial interpretation and legislative negotiation, we have gone in the complete opposite direction. It is a myth today to say that the federal government is stronger than or even as strong as the collective powers of the provinces. Let me set out immediately the distribution of direct expenditures on goods and services between the two levels of government over the past 113 years.

In 1870 the federal government spent 52 per cent and the provincial governments, including the municipalities, 48 per cent. By 1926 we were down to 26 per cent and the provincial and municipal governments up to 74 per cent. In 1950 we moved up to 48 per cent with a provincial-municipal level of 52 per cent. In 1975 we were down to 24 per cent and the provinces with the municipalities were spending three times as much as us.

We have been too generous to the provinces and in our generosity have seriously impaired the imbalance of federal-provincial relations. No matter what party you belong to, you