

[Texte]

perspective on what we are supposed to be doing here. This is not a constitution which belongs to us or to the politicians of Canada, it belongs to the people of Canada: and the issue here is not our convenience, the issue is how we ensure that Canadians be heard about their constitution. Mr. Chairman, if I sound exercise, it is in part because of your comment about avoiding repetition because if the goal of this Committee will be to exclude people coming before it or making points which have been made previously then I say we are extremely negligent in terms of discharging our responsibilities because surely when we are considering the constitution of Canada one of the things we should be looking for is the consensus of the Canadians as to what they want in their constitution and consensus implies to me not that you exclude people if they say that they agree with something that has been heard before but rather that you invite people to indicate where they are in agreement, where they are in disagreement and you try to get some sort of an idea as to what is acceptable to the vast majority of Canadians.

If there has been one thing that has characterized this debate to date, it has been the extent to which it has been dominated by politicians in which the public has been shut out in the discussion of their constitution. Surely if the goal, as the Prime Minister has indicated, of constitutional change is to promote the unity of Canada, consensus has to be the instrument that we use to achieve that, and ensuring that individual Canadians are heard; ordinary Canadians, working Canadians, plain Canadians, not people necessarily strictly who belong to one organization or another or who have academic credentials or who belong to political groups, but ordinary every day Canadians have a right to be heard about their constitution and they have a right to be heard when they have points to be made which have been made already because that is what is involved in the development of a consensus. If we have a constitution which is imposed from the top down by the politicians after excluding the right of Canadians to be heard if they have something to say which has already been said, then how can we expect to get public acceptance of what we are doing.

Mr. Chairman, many ordinary Canadians in my constituency as in yours, would have difficulty in terms of preparing some sort of a learned brief that would have to be considered by the steering committee and then have it decided whether or not their opinions were worthy of being called before this Committee. But they have very deep felt feelings about this country, they have very heartfelt concerns about the direction in which we are going in this country and they have a right to be heard about the constitution of their country and any suggestion that it is somehow wrong to encourage them to think that they should have that right, to appear before this full Committee to make that presentation, I think is doing a disservice to the people of Canada.

Mr. Chairman, I had indicated before that I had hoped to enquire of Senator Hays as to his understanding of the undertaking given by the Government House Leader, Mr. Perrault, in the Senate two nights ago, or three nights ago. You will remember Mr. Chairman, yesterday we raised questions in the

[Traduction]

tution n'appartient pas aux hommes politiques mais au peuple canadien: il ne s'agit donc pas de faire ce qui nous convient le mieux, mais de permettre aux Canadiens de se prononcer sur leur propre constitution. Si je me suis un peu choqué, monsieur le président, c'est que vous avez parlé d'éviter la répétition. Ce serait fuir devant nos responsabilités que d'empêcher certaines personnes de venir témoigner ou de présenter des arguments déjà invoqués par d'autres. Nous devons, entre autres choses, assurer que les Canadiens s'entendent sur le contenu de la nouvelle constitution, ce qui signifie que l'on ne peut pas empêcher des gens de témoigner sous prétexte qu'on a déjà entendu ce qu'ils vont dire. Il faut plutôt inviter les gens à se prononcer pour ou contre les propositions pour pouvoir se faire une idée de ce qui conviendrait à la majorité des Canadiens.

Jusqu'ici ce sont les hommes politiques qui dominent dans ce débat; le public n'a pas pu y participer. Si, comme le premier ministre le prétend, la réforme constitutionnelle doit promouvoir l'unité canadienne, il va falloir arriver à un consensus pour assurer le Canadien moyen, qui n'appartient à aucun organisme ou parti politique, qui n'a pas de diplôme, sa participation au débat. Les Canadiens ont le droit de se faire entendre, même si les arguments qu'ils entendent présenter ont été invoqués, car c'est ainsi qu'on arrive à un consensus. Ce n'est pas en imposant la constitution au peuple canadien qu'on va les convaincre de l'accepter.

Monsieur le président, un bon nombre des Canadiens que nous représentons, vous et moi, auraient de la difficulté à rédiger un mémoire, sachant qu'il sera jugé par le sous-comité. Mais ces gens-là sont très attachés au Canada et s'intéressent à son avenir. Ils ont le droit de se prononcer sur la constitution de leur pays. Et nous aurions tort de les décourager de comparaître devant le Comité.

J'ai indiqué tout à l'heure, monsieur le président, que j'espère pouvoir interroger le sénateur Hays sur la déclaration faite au Sénat, il y a deux ou trois jours, par le leader du gouvernement en Chambre, M. Perrault; vous vous souviendrez, monsieur le président, que nous avons soulevé des ques-