

*Government Orders*

Democracy was scary at one time. Giving the right to vote to those who did not have a right to vote previously might have been scary to some at one time, giving the right to vote to people who did not own property for instance, and so on.

Maybe all those things were scary to whomever at some point but our system has evolved, our system has changed, and we have now the institutions that we all know so well. One of the things that we now need in this constitutional debate is a referendum.

It was the Statute of Westminster of 1931 that gave this country its independence. It was on that day that we started to debate in Canada how to repatriate and amend the Canadian Constitution. It took 51 years in the great Canadian compromise before we could repatriate the Constitution. Unfortunately, even though all federal political parties at the time in 1982 were in favour of it, even though 74 Quebec federal MPs were in favour of the repatriation of the Constitution, because there was a separatist government in that province at the time the Constitution was not ratified by one province and therefore a certain political legitimacy to the whole process has been questioned since.

*[Translation]*

Today we have an opportunity to equip ourselves with a tool so that Canadians can express their opinion on the constitutional issue. The tool, of course, is a referendum.

• (1540)

As most hon. members already know, I was born in Quebec and spent much of my life in another province. I am a francophone in a heavily English speaking province. That is why it is important to remember that a referendum must not only express the will of the majority but also the will of the regions of our country, so as to avoid what some might call the tyranny of the majority.

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, in his wisdom, as well as the hon. member for Papineau and all my colleagues, have asked the government to make the voice of each region count in the referendum. In other words, my colleagues in the Liberal Party and I are in favour of the double majority principle; this means that for the Constitution to pass, it must receive a majority of

at least 51 per cent throughout Canada. In addition, a proposed Constitution must have a majority in each of the major regions of Canada, the four regions designated in the British North America Act of 1867 and after. Some may say that there should be five regions instead of four, and so on. We could debate that at some point. At the present time, four regions are recognized. Let us hope that the constitutional agreement which I hope we will have soon between the federal government and all the provincial governments will not only be a unanimous agreement among them but will later receive majority approval in all provinces. There would be no need to ask whether there were a majority in all regions if we already had a majority in all provinces. But still we should have a guarantee of at least a regional majority. In any case, I would hope for more. Once we have that majority in all parts of the country, the various federal and provincial legislatures could pass the Constitution Act. I am sure that we could then put the whole constitutional issue behind us and concentrate as Canadians on making our country prosperous and improving the welfare of Canadians who gave us the honour and the privilege of asking us to represent them in this illustrious assembly.

*[English]*

Therefore, what I and my colleagues would like are a number of amendments to this bill in order to ensure such things as a majority for regions, to ensure that the question that will be posed later would be an exact referendum question, such that it is the appropriate one, to ensure that there is a limit on expenditures and, of course, to make the referendum compulsory upon an agreement occurring.

Of course, it is not necessary to have a referendum if there is no agreement among the first ministers. There will not be a question to put, but what I personally want and I am sure all of my colleagues want is an agreement between the first ministers. We want assurance that that agreement would go to a referendum, not a referendum if necessary but not necessarily a referendum. That is not acceptable in 1992.

We need more than that. We need assurances. Canadians really expect us to give them those kinds of assurances.