

Government Orders

not pull this country together but will make further stress and strain on the country.

In terms of time we are talking about a nation that has been here for 125 years. It was only 10 years ago in 1982 that we got the Constitution back to this country so that we could amend it. Many people can complain about the then Prime Minister. I sat in the opposition then and the then Prime Minister, Mr. Trudeau, may have had many things that people could complain about. However, one reason I voted for the Constitution bill was that it at least brought it back to this country so that Canadians finally could try to amend it and change it.

That was just 10 years ago after 115 years that the Constitution was stuck in England. Goodness gracious, we only got our own citizenship in this country 80 years after the country was formed in 1947 and we only got our flag in 1965, 98 years after the country was formed. With those three little demarcation dates in history, the Constitution only came back here in 1982. The act of citizenship came in 1947. Finally we had the flag, which took over 40 years through all parliamentary committees, going from the Union Jack, to having official colours red and white, and then finally having the ensign. Finally after 40 some years of different parliamentary debate and different parliamentary committees, we finally raised the flag on February 15, 1965 just outside these Parliament Buildings.

With that perspective in terms of history, let us not box ourselves in to artificial deadlines that are going to do more to rip this country apart than to bring it together.

As far as I am concerned, in the closing moments that I have I could give you Pat's panacea for political problems in this country. It would be to abolish the Senate, in effect to make sure that the character of the distinctive culture, language and civil code of Quebec is recognized and implemented through proper law, and in effect fix the term of Parliament so that while the Prime Minister might be able to call elections within the fixed term, that a certain time, a certain fixed date, an election is held if he did not call for the fixed term. You would not be able to play around with all of the dates and the manoeuvring and the political manipulation that you have and the bad legislation and all the weird things that

happen as you get closer with the Prime Minister deciding where he sits in the polls.

• (1200)

That is a forlorn hope at this time of our constitutional discussion but anyone who thinks we are coming up with a constitutional package from the constitutional conferences that are going along today, no matter how sincere is whistling Dixie when they have not even got to Senate reform. They have not defined what self-government and the aboriginal inherent right is, let alone the division of powers.

We are going to be faced with a question that we do not even know. The worst thing about this bill, in conclusion, is the three-day limit imposed in this bill on the bill that is going to define the question. That question is going to be the question that makes or breaks Canada. It is the question that is going to decide if we have a Canada. I have never yet seen in my history of 20-odd years as a member that as you debate one bill you already impose closure on the bill that is going to follow, that is, the question bill.

That is not the way to build a consensus and that is not the way to build the non-partisan attitude that we need if we are going to have a greater Canada which we can have if we have the right leadership.

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in this very important debate. I was saddened, as were most of the members on this side of the House, including the previous speaker, by the fact that we had to have closure this morning.

We have a most important debate and we are trying to give a message to Canadians that we want to open up the constitutional debate but in the process of talking about opening up the debate, we close it down.

These contradictions are not lost on the voters and the people who are trying to right many wrongs in this country.

This is a little bit of a transformation for me to be standing up and supporting a referendum. I must say that as a university professor teaching political science for 15 years before I became a member of Parliament, I spent a long time thinking about questions such as referenda and plebiscites and the democratization of our process.