

Private Members' Business

represented constantly at the centre of this country, which is the Parliament of Canada?

Perhaps our country is too diverse for a majority government to work. A majority government might just respond to the huge population centres and forget about the smaller populated areas of this country.

Should we take a look at our confidence votes in the house? Should we give members of Parliament more freedom, regardless of party, to vote the way that they see fit?

What this motion is about is a question of direct democracy. It is a direct democracy versus representative democracy. Should we have the power to recall members of Parliament when they do not listen to the wishes of their people in their own ridings? Should we give the people of this country the power to initiate referenda that are binding on the Government of Canada and on this Parliament? Should the Government of Canada itself have the power to initiate referenda.

The first part of that question was answered several times by a previous Liberal government. I remember back in 1975 or 1976 when it proposed that the government have the power to initiate referenda on the Constitution. I remember the constitutional patriation act back in 1980 when Mr. Trudeau suggested that the Government of Canada should have the power to have referenda on constitutional amendments. I remember Pepin-Robarts back in that same period of time, back in the 1970s, suggesting a referenda procedure. It has been looked at very thoroughly.

The other part of this resolution that is new and different coming from my friend from Calgary is: Should the Canadian people have the right to initiate referenda? He is saying that with 10 per cent of the voters signing a petition they should have that right.

I did not take a serious look at that. It is a major deviation from what we know today, but I also want to suggest to the House that we look at a warning as well because we may indeed go too far down that road.

An example of that today is the state of California. In California there are about 13.5 million voters, and I believe it takes only about 3 per cent of the electorate to initiate a binding referendum. It takes 372,000 people, and I think that is far too few. It allows special interest groups to manipulate the system. If we take a look at the proposition seriously, we should make sure we do not go too far down that road. There is an election coming up

on November 6 of this year in that state. There will be 20 referenda questions on the ballot, 20 different initiatives. The ballot booklet explaining the vote is 144 pages long. They are estimating that the campaign, surrounding these referenda in California, will cost around \$200 million.

• (1350)

This is an example of referendums gone wild; they have gone too far in the direction of referendums initiated by the electorate. Also in the state of California, for example, we have found that referendums now have become a cottage industry. They are in the hands of a small group of people who represent special interests.

We must guard against that in this country and indeed we should look very seriously at this kind of a proposal. As well we must look at the idea of whether or not referendums unite people or divide people.

A referendum can be very, very divisive. That is something we must consider very seriously. It can be divisive. It can be, as it is in California, a process which is hijacked by special interest groups.

There was a referendum in California, for example, in 1984 about state lotteries. The campaign for that referendum cost \$2.6 million, but \$2.2 million of that came from one company that manufactured lottery tickets. That shows you, Mr. Speaker, that they can become captives of special interest groups. They can be hijacked by special interest groups. In California now it apparently costs up to \$2 a name to campaign to get names on a petition to initiate a referendum. I leave us with that warning.

I see my time has run out. Let me refer to an article in *The Globe and Mail* of October 15 which refers to a referendum law in California that was explained to a B.C. Social Credit Convention. They warn that this cannot be used by ordinary people but can be used by special interest groups such as big business to promote what they want. I think we have to be very careful if we go down this road that we do not go as far as they have in the state of California.

With that, I think we should take a serious look at this idea. My friend from Calgary is saying that it should not go as far as California. Indeed one needs 10 per cent of the voters of this country to initiate a referendum, rather than 3 per cent or 4 per cent as it is in California. Let us at least take a look at it in terms of referendums on constitutional matters. Let us debate this. Let us open