

*The Constitution**[Translation]*

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues appreciate the fact that I am equally fluent in French and English, for I feel wholly immersed in both cultures.

From the early days of confederation the province of Quebec has acknowledged the right to English education for its minorities, Protestant as well as Catholic.

Manitoba was called to order by the Supreme Court and asked to honour the letter and the spirit of the Manitoba Act of 1870 and, of course, it has to abide by that act.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms which we propose to enshrine in the Constitution will give the French and English minorities, wherever they may be, the right to education in the institutions of the linguistic minority, financed with public funds, when the number of children warrants.

I recall once again that the premier of Manitoba has always spoken against enshrining the educational rights of the official minorities. What we are doing now is to make sure that the linguistic minorities will have access to education in their mother tongue, whether they are Francophones outside Quebec or Anglophones inside Quebec.

Mr. Speaker, I want to dispel the false notion that our charter is not made in Canada. Opposition members have kept repeating that it is not a constitution made in Canada. I would suggest to those hon. members that a great many years have prepared us for that constitution. Ever since Quebec's referendum last spring we have joined the provinces in our quest for a Canadian constitution and, since last October, all the members on both sides of this House and the members of the Senate have been pondering over the Canadian constitution made here in Canada.

[English]

During the first phase of our debate, 74 members of Parliament and 34 senators were given the chance to speak out on the resolution. In phase two of the debate we opened the floor to the Canadian public. The committee held 106 meetings in the course of 56 days for a total of 267 sitting hours. We listened to 95 groups and five expert witnesses who came before the committee and we received letters from 914 individuals and 294 groups. Many of the recommendations these groups and individuals made were extremely helpful in our efforts to bring further amendments to the resolution on a Constitution made in Canada.

In this third phase of the debate, well over 100 members and senators have spoken on the resolution. It is evident, therefore, that we are not proceeding unilaterally to patriate the Constitution. We have given to all Canadians the opportunity to take part in this process.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Horsefeathers.

Mr. Bockstael: I remind this House that from the beginning the Official Opposition has attempted to stall the process. The Official Opposition said it would do anything to slow down the process. Then members of the Official Opposition insisted that we needed public participation. We had to have television, so we gave them television. We had to listen to the public. We had to allow representations to be made. We had to hold public hearings. We had to have consultations so that there would be input by the citizens of Canada. We did this. It is really the asides one hears at such meetings which count. Members of the Official Opposition said, "We would keep you here until next Christmas if we could". The point is that they were not interested in giving Canada its Constitution. They preferred to retard and to withhold from the Canadian people a Constitution and a charter of rights.

● (2140)

I would like to contrast this with the premiers of the provinces. Who do they speak for? I gave the example of Premier Lyon a few moments ago. Who have the premiers consulted with? Talk about unilateral action! Look at the dissenting premiers who do not approach anyone, who do not consult with any of their electorate but who come forward and say that they are the spokesmen for the people of their province.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bockstael: Time after time we heard the opposition say "Why do you not go back to those premiers one more time?" For what purpose? I can recall the comments, reported in the media, of the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) and the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie), who were attending the leadership convention at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa and who felt sure that Premier Lyon would be amenable to a charter of rights. A few days later in Winnipeg I heard Premier Lyon say "I speak for myself. The hon. members of the federal Conservative party do not speak for me and I will not approve a charter of rights."

How can they ask us to go back to the premiers who do not want such a thing, who want to withhold those rights from the Canadian people?

Mr. Taylor: Do you want unity in the country?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bockstael: Mr. Speaker, once and for all we should let the Canadian people know that it is a myth that this unilateral action is not unilateral. It is the participatory action of the elected people of this country who represent all of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bockstael: That includes the territories, not the private domain of each of the premiers who want to trade off rights for their privileges and resources.