

*The Constitution*

you will note, the hon. member for Victoria-Haliburton (Mr. Scott) had the floor when we were debating this matter a few weeks ago, and he continued his remarks yesterday. In fact, he was allowed, theoretically, ten minutes more than the order since we felt he had started under the old rules and should not be restricted. We have since alternated government speakers with opposition speakers. There was some arrangement made yesterday to accommodate the hon. member for Brant; but that was strictly a matter of the Chair dealing with the opposition party. The normal rotation is four government speakers and four opposition speakers; that is, four Liberals, three Conservatives and one member of the NDP.

At this point in time, Mr. Speaker, according to normal practice and according to the point I made yesterday with the Deputy Speaker and with the hon. member for Lachine (Mr. Blaker), in telling the Chair who our speakers would be, it is now the turn of the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Tousignant). You have recognized the hon. member for Témiscamingue, and if members opposite are going to force the issue, move a motion and cause a vote to be taken, that is something we do not want. We do not want any unpleasantness. I am sure my hon. friend from Témiscamingue will withdraw. But I must say that in this case it is the right of the government member, having been recognized, to speak in the normal rotation.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** Order, please. I would like to clarify this situation. I have been reminded by the hon. member for Provencher that a decision was made by the Chair yesterday of which I was not aware. Subsequently, the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Collenette), said that if there was any arrangement it is not that any speaker on the government side will be lost. He said that he intends to exercise his party's prerogative, which is to have one speaker for the government opposing one speaker for the opposition. I also informed the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty) that he would be the next speaker.

There was no other hon. member seeking the floor at that time, nor had I received notice from any member seeking the floor. I did receive a note from the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Tousignant) informing me that he wished to seek the floor. Therefore, following the tradition of alternating from one government speaker to one speaker from the opposition, I had to recognize the hon. member for Témiscamingue. The parliamentary secretary now suggests that there could be an undertaking made by the hon. member for Témiscamingue that he would seek the floor later.

**Mr. Tousignant:** I agree to that, Mr. Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** The matter has now been resolved. The Chair recognizes the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe.

**Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to begin my remarks by thanking the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Tousignant). This situation

was not of his making and I appreciate his graciousness and generosity in being willing to stand down to allow a member of the official opposition to speak now.

In the remarks of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) there was very little with which I agreed. But there was one point I agreed with, namely that this resolution which is before the House today is one of the most important pieces of legislation to come before Parliament in 50 years. That is why the conduct of this debate and the resolution itself is critical, and it is why the attention of all Canadians is focused today on Ottawa. This is why Canadians from one coast to another are expecting this government and this Parliament to accept their responsibility to unify Canadians, to bring this country together; to have as the last achievement of our nationhood in Canada an act which unifies Canadians, which gives them hope for the future instead of embittering them, driving them apart and casting serious doubts upon our ability as a country to survive in the future.

Parliament is now entering the second to last phase of the government's constitutional plans this week. It is a project which was justified to Canadians on the grounds of unity and national maturity, but which was conceived and promoted in division and colonialism. The government's strategy, which was made clear in the infamous Kirby memorandum and which was also made clear today in the partisan, divisive and bitter speech made by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien), has been to pit region against region and Canadian against Canadian. It has been to use our last colonial ties to make major changes to our Constitution in a foreign country.

Gaining the last element of our independence, which should have caused unparalleled unity among Canadians. Embedding basic human and political rights in our Constitution, should have caused celebration of our good fortune as one of the freest people on earth. Instead the government, through its stubborn and dangerous belief that our Constitution is the property not of 23 million Canadians but of one man, has corroded the national ties which keep this Canada from breaking into ten unconnected fragments of a country. It is common sense and good will which binds Canadians together; yet the government's actions have defied common sense and have damaged that goodwill.

When members of this House listened to the speech given by the Minister of Justice today, or when they sat through the constitutional screed of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in which he spoke for two hours and 13 minutes on March 23, did members hear either of them refer to the Canadian traditions which form much of this country's rich heritage? Did they hear a defence of our Constitution which has helped Canadians stay united and free for over a century while many other countries which had a history of civilized behaviour far older than ours, disintegrated into social chaos and dictatorship? Did they hear either the Minister of Justice or the Prime Minister praise our federal system of government, which with our thinly spread population dispersed over the second largest land mass of any country in the world, has managed to strike the proper balance between the needs of the nation and the