

*Government Orders*

opposition if it wants a bridge, yes or no? We are not sure any more.

• (1725)

**Mr. Caccia:** Madam Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. member feels somewhat confused or does not understand that the Liberal Party, in keeping with a tradition of allowing freedom of thought and opinion, has agreed to an open, honest debate on an issue of public importance such as this one. I would hope that the same spirit of openness prevails within his party. Certain members of the Bloc, notably the distinguished environment critic, had the opportunity and were able to express their opinion freely this afternoon, particularly on such issues as sustainable development and environmental protection.

I listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. member whose position is similar, if you will, to my own. The views he has expressed will enrich the debate taking place in the House this afternoon.

**Mr. René Laurin (Joliette):** Madam Speaker, this will be a brief comment, just to tell the member of the government party: good for them if they are free to express themselves without necessarily following the party line. However, within the Bloc Québécois, we had a consensus before the election. We knew beforehand on what we agreed and disagreed. We solved our problems before; then when we came here, we came as a bloc and today we think as a bloc.

So if the party in power had thought about it before, perhaps you could have made promises that would have seemed more sincere to your constituents and today you would not need to appear divided.

**Mr. Caccia:** I am not aware that in the programs of the Bloc Québécois before the election, all members of the party had taken a position in favour of building the bridge. But if such a position was indeed taken, I would be very glad to see it, if the member wants to show it to me one of these days.

[*English*]

**Mr. John English (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs):** Madam Speaker, I am speaking today in support of this resolution not because I am following the party line. However I listened with great interest to the remarks of my colleagues. It is an indication our party is willing to accept a diversity of viewpoint. I am not affected in my decision because I sit beside the hon. member for Halifax and the hon. member for Egmont who are speaking strongly in support of the resolution.

What we have heard today in the debate reflects a very good argument for the fixed link and for the constitutional amendment. In terms of jobs we have heard that the proposal will create 5,300 jobs over a period of three years. Moreover, we

have heard that 70 per cent of procurement requirements will be filled in Atlantic Canada.

We have also heard that tourism will be increased—and I say in respect to my colleague from Davenport that tourism should be considered in this respect—by about 30 per cent during the period of the bridge construction and about 25 per cent thereafter. This is a significant economic stimulus for a province and an area which has suffered greatly in the past decades.

• (1730)

One of the members opposite mentioned that the project was supported by a plebiscite in 1988, six years ago. We have also heard requests for consultation. Surely six years and 80 public meetings is adequate consultation.

We heard other members from Prince Edward Island, including the member for Egmont, say there are waiting times of three to five hours for the ferries. It affects transportation to the island. We also heard the hon. member for Halifax describe how she had to party for seven hours on a ferry that could not get across the water.

These are all impressive arguments which have convinced me without question that this proposition should be supported.

I come from the province of Ontario as do many other members on this side. My province through its support of the general revenue will support this project. I have heard several comments today which made me think that in this kind of basic proposition where we share responsibilities, it is not always recognized.

Someone suggested this particular project affected all parts of Canada because of its need for constitutional amendment and the general revenues of Canada would be used and therefore it should be subject to the interests of all of Canada. That member who comes from the province of British Columbia should recall there have been many items of this kind in the past, including a case in the province of British Columbia.

When British Columbia entered Confederation there was an agreement in the terms of union for British Columbia that a railway would be built with subsidies amounting to \$50 million, enormous sums at that time equal to the total general revenue of Canada. That is in the Constitution, just of course as the ferries were in 1873.

We have an obligation along these same lines. When a constitutional amendment which so clearly affects a single province or two provinces in this case, for the sake of the efficiency of the Constitution such bilateral amendments should proceed without requiring even more protracted consultation or negotiation in the constitutional realm.

The people of Prince Edward Island have waited a long time for a bridge. We heard from one hon. member earlier that it was over 100 years ago in the 1880s when a fixed link of a certain kind was first proposed. It was again proposed in the 1950s and 1960s. In those cases it did not come to fruition. Many other