

*Constitution of Canada*

We are certainly in favour of a study aimed at amending our constitution. We were not the last, when we arrived here in 1962, to ask that the constitution be amended.

Today, we are asked to establish a committee to study our constitutional problems. I feel that before considering constitutional reform we should first find out how the constitution should have been applied.

The federal and provincial governments failed to respect our constitution in the past, and before thinking of amending it, it is important to bear this in mind.

If history proves that we have often neglected to apply our constitution, how can we hope that a new constitution will fare better?

In my opinion, we should first give the people of this country and our legislative bodies the moral assurance that the present constitution has been brought into operation. Unfortunately, past experience tends to prove otherwise. Furthermore, how is it that in the troubled days that we are now living, we can't interrupt our regular activities to discuss the constitution as a matter of urgency while all across Canada, people are making use of radical means of protest?

The committee members are travelling to the Maritimes next week and from what I know, their hotel accommodations and their transportation have already been arranged and witnesses have been requested to appear before committee. Oddly enough, the House has not yet approved their trip.

In my opinion we proceeded too quickly. We are acting according to a plan whose consequence is that instead of pouring water on the very hot constitutional issue we are throwing oil on it. In view of the political situation in Canada, at a time when the Committee on the Constitution is about to leave for the Maritimes and other provinces in order to hear evidence and given above all the critical climate in Quebec, it surely will be a good opportunity for the separatists, the members of the FLQ and other radicals to exploit the situation in order to stage representations and demonstrations, which will be in direct contradiction with the aims behind the setting up of the Committee on the Constitution: to make a logical, serious and objective study. Perhaps the Committee will have to meet in localities where demonstrations with a lamentable outcome will take place.

● (2:30 p.m.)

I do not wish to be a prophet of doom but in the present circumstances I would suggest postponing the Committee's travels for a few weeks to allow the temporary situation in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada to improve, as I hope it will.

I quite fail to see any urgency for the motion, although personally I approve of it but feel that because of present circumstances adopting it would be giving revolutionaries and radicals an opportunity to mislead the people as to its purpose.

[Mr. Rondeau.]

**Mr. Gilles Marceau (Lapointe):** Mr. Speaker, I would like in the next few minutes to make a modest contribution to the present proceedings on the establishment of a joint committee of the House of Commons and the Senate for the purpose of considering the constitution.

Last year it was my privilege to attend the meetings of this committee which were conducted with remarkable ability by the hon. member for Windsor-Wakerville (Mr. MacGuigan and the hon. Senator Lamontagne.

We must bear in mind that the activities of the Committee on the Constitution will not necessarily lead to a complete revamping. The purpose of this committee is mainly to facilitate fruitful dialogue not only with hon. members but with the entire population.

I do not agree with those who claim that any study of the constitution must bring about a new or amended constitution. Above all, what is most essential, is not to impose a constitution on the people, but to become aware of what the people want. Canadians, whatever their origin, must be made to agree to live together in the same country. As for those who expect this committee to give them a new or an amended constitution, they are not helping the people.

The hon. member for Shefford (Mr. Rondeau) said earlier that he did not approve of the members of the Committee on the Constitution going to the Maritimes. All I will say to him is that, not being a member of this committee, he cannot grasp its importance or its value.

When we had the opportunity, not so long ago, to go to the Yukon and Manitoba, I was the first to realize that I did not really know my huge country nor its problems that are often the same as those of Quebec which is very often held to be different but is not in some respects.

I think that such trips allow us to get in touch with the people themselves and not only with the agencies which represent an important part of the population. What is most important, Mr. Speaker, it is to meet people, to talk with them and to determine what they want and how they want to live in our great country.

I think that this committee is essential, that proceedings should go on just as in the last session. Again, I do not expect in the near future a new constitution or important amendments to it, but I hope that all hon. members are aware that regardless of political parties, we have received a mandate to represent not a party but the people and to try to meet their real needs.

As the hon. member for Charlevoix (Mr. Asselin) said, I also feel quite optimistic and I am convinced that despite the momentary difficulties we are having there will arise a spirit of understanding among all Canadians.

Events now taking place in Quebec are most important and will perhaps make more Canadians realize that we are now living a critical period of our history. Instead of being disheartened, of losing hope, of refusing to face facts, it is important that we, English-speaking or French-speaking Canadians, should join forces to give Canada a suitable structure.