

Government Orders

The important thing today is to talk about why Quebec refused to join the rest of Canada to deal with the constitutional question. We have to remember what happened in 1981 when tactics were used that led to some very serious problems, and then from 1987 to 1990, we had Meech Lake, which fell through. We should remember that the biggest problem was the general attitude in English Canada.

Everything started in the fall of 1989 with New Brunswick. Mr. MacKenna started it. Remember Sault St. Marie and how people trampled the Quebec flag. Remember Clyde Wells, Filmon and Carstairs. And above all, remember Mulroney's attitude in this debate. Basically, that is what we have to deal with. We don't need a referendum on the Constitution.

Quebec asked for an agreement that would allow it to live like the society it is. Let us see some proposals, not just another strategy. The Mulroney government promised to table offers that would be satisfactory to Quebec. It should stop beating around the bush and table those offers. It should stop this endless series of committees. Do you not think we are fed up, Mr. Speaker? We had Charest, and after that Beaudoin-Edwards, Dobbie-Castonguay and then Beaudoin-Dobbie. We had government committees, we had the Spicer commission, we had the PC caucus from Quebec which made two or three futile attempts. We had constitutional conferences. We had ministers conferences. We had first ministers conferences. And thousands of officials wasting their time discussing the Constitution, at our expense. And the result was zilch. Today they want us to believe that a Canadian referendum with patently antidemocratic rules will make the difference.

We must realize that we cannot deal with the real problems today because we are still stuck with the constitutional question. If we had resolved the constitutional question two years ago, we would have had all this time to talk about the recession, the decline in our standard of living, the rising deficit, taxes, unemployment, school dropouts, and the monumental failure of this government to run the country. Instead of that two years after —

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I am sorry, but the hon. member's time has now expired.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, this debate is a serious one. I am sorry that the time is so limited and I am sorry that the government has reverted to its usual technique of using closure in debate on a matter as important as this.

The government was urged by the Official Opposition to bring this bill in months and months and months ago. This has been a policy of this party for some time. The government made a promise, through the Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs, to introduce this bill months and months and months ago. Instead, it dilly-dallied and shilly-shallied and gave a lot of mumbo-jumbo, broke its promise to the opposition and held it up. Now it brings it in. Last Friday it was introduced and it is screaming and ranting that if we do not pass it right away we are going to somehow damage the fabric of this country. It is saying that we have to pass this bill, flawed as it is, and get on with it.

I take strong exception to this disgraceful approach of the government to the House. The debate can go on in a Tory caucus and once it is settled there the rest of us are supposed to bow down and worship and just accept whatever the government passes out. I will not do so.

I object to the government's dealings in this matter. It is wrong.

I want to look at what the government House leader said the other day in his speech and it was clearly wrong. He said: "The Canada Elections Act legislation, which enjoys the great respect and confidence of Canadians throughout the country, would provide the basic framework under which any referendum would be held. The Chief Electoral Officer would have the same responsibility for the conduct of a referendum as he has for the conduct of a general election". In other words, the government House leader was suggesting that somehow this bill and the Canada Elections Act are one and the same. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Let us look at the changes the government made in the Canada Elections Act to determine the bona fides of what the government House leader was saying because somehow he was suggesting that he was being above-board and honest with Canadians in his dealings on this bill. I suggest exactly the opposite is so. What he did was