

● (1630)

In that connection, the Reform Party in the west and other so-called third parties represent not a new phenomenon in Canadian politics but an old phenomenon in a new form. Therefore, Mr. Spicer and his colleagues, being people of inquiring and open minds, would be very interested to discuss with members of that party the grievances unmet, or the objectives unattained, that have led them to form new political parties, whether in the west, in Quebec, or wherever. There is no intention to exclude politicians, serving members of Parliament, from taking part in the process. Indeed, it is encouraged.

I repeat, however, that we want to give centre stage to ordinary Canadians so that they may have their say about the future of their country.

**Senator Perrault:** As a supplementary, I fully support your expressed view that "ordinary Canadians" should be heard. No Canadian is really ordinary, but I know what the government leader is saying. I think that to single out one party and say that commissioners will be interested in hearing from the Reform Party but not from Conservatives or Liberals because they are so-called "old-line" parties is a bit naive. I believe there are many people in this assembly, sitting on both sides of the chamber, who have some constructive ideas about the future of this country. It disturbs me to think that somehow priority will be given to such so-called "new groups" as the bloc populaire and the Reform Party, and that somehow opinions expressed by others associated with other parties are second rate or irrelevant. I hope we can construe from his reply that the Honourable Leader that the Government in this place shares that view.

**Hon. George van Roggen:** I have a supplementary question to Senator Perrault's question. As an aside, I might say that the government will rue the day it appointed this particular gentleman as chairman of this commission. However, that is not my question.

Does the Leader of the Government in the Senate have a view on whether or not Mr. Spicer's reference to old-line parties would include the NDP, or is that a new-line party?

**Senator Murray:** I would not have the faintest idea; but to take up the point made by Senator Perrault earlier, there will be opportunity not just for disenchanted Conservatives, but also for disenchanted Liberals, although there will not be time to hear from them all.

**Senator Perrault:** Presumably only so long as they go under a new title. If they are a so-called "new group," would that be acceptable to Mr. Spicer? I am concerned that the attitude is almost one of: "Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up." All options should be open to this committee, even with relation to the Senate. Mr. Spicer should not be saying that he still thinks the Senate should be abolished, but he should approach all options with an open mind. One wonders how open it is.

**Senator Murray:** We are not seeking from the panel of Mr. Spicer and his colleagues a model for a reformed Senate. We are not seeking from them recommendations as to future

[Senator Murray.]

amendments to the Constitution. We are sending them out to encourage and conduct a dialogue among Canadians as to the values they hold in common and the kind of country they want to see this country become.

What we expect in the report from Mr. Spicer and his colleagues is a summary of their findings as to where a consensus may lie in this country, what divisions have yet to be bridged, and whether in a conceptual sense there are ways in which these divisions among Canadians can be overcome.

**Senator van Roggen:** Does the Leader of the Government really suggest that a commission needs to travel across the country to hear the views of individual Canadians just on the nature of a Canada they would like to see? I would suggest that you do not need a commission of this nature, which will run into millions of dollars, simply to find out what Canadians want. If you had a consensus from 26 million people, you would find that they would like a country that is united, peaceful, prosperous and democratic. Beyond that you get down to technicalities, not generalities.

**Senator Murray:** I invite my honourable friend to read the speech that the Right Honourable the Prime Minister made in the other place, and the terms of reference that have been issued for this Citizens' Forum.

Let me give some examples of the areas where we think consensus is lacking and where in this country we must try to build that consensus. First is the relationship between Aboriginal Canadians and other Canadians. We think it is quite important that there be a dialogue among Canadians, Aboriginals and others, about their attitudes and aspirations. A consensus is lacking on this subject, and nowhere more so than in my honourable friend's province and other provinces where a majority of Aboriginal peoples live.

A second example is the various competing, if not conflicting, elements in Canadian society, the concept of individual rights versus collective rights.

A third example is the relationship between the French and English-speaking people of this country.

A fourth example is the policy of multiculturalism and how it is reconciled with the desire for national unity.

Another example is whether our institutions, parliamentary institutions in particular, are serving all of Canada as well as they might, and whether there are structural changes that should be made in them.

There is a whole list of very important areas on which it is necessary that Canadians confront some rather difficult questions, and on which the Citizens' Forum, by encouraging dialogue, try to achieve consensus on these questions before we can talk about future constitutional amendments or reform of our institutions.

**Senator van Roggen:** I am sure we all wish them luck.