

Supply—Privy Council

regard to the position taken by government and by the Prime Minister in particular in connection with the constitutional difficulties which the country has been experiencing. Some time ago I asked the Prime Minister if he did not think it was now time to establish in this parliament a parliamentary committee to examine the problems in connection with our constitutional position and the changes that are proposed so that we could all be brought into the picture. The Prime Minister made a slick, glib reply and suggested that the opposition parties had not made up their minds. That is no so. Our position has been made clear, but that is beside the point. For far too long the government and the Prime Minister have taken the arrogant and secretive position that constitutional changes are too precious to be entrusted to any but those who are hidden in the bureaucratic recesses of the government.

The people of this country are entitled to know what proposals are to be made. They are entitled to participate in debate through their elected representatives in this chamber. The prime minister of Quebec recently grappled with this problem and saw fit to disclose publicly the proposals which had been discussed in the constitutional committee of that province. We may or may not agree with those changes. Yet nothing, I submit, is more important to the people of this country than the opportunity to decide whether certain areas of responsibility shall be left with the federal or provincial governments.

I suggest to the government it is time it stopped hiding behind the barricade it has erected. It is time to bring the people of Canada into the picture. It is time to turn this matter into a national debate. The people of Canada are entitled to have some say and we are entitled to have some say on their behalf.

I submit that the Prime Minister cannot long delay. I know he has a majority and can deny our request. I suggest to him, nevertheless, that authority and majorities ought to be used with great circumspection. It is high time a committee of this parliament was established so that we might air in public all areas and all problems associated with this matter. I know that when it comes to working out details we shall require legal and economic experts. I submit this is far too important an issue to be left bottled up. I suggest that the Prime Minister should seriously consider revising his opinion, climb off his high horse and bring this matter before parliament where it should have been long ago.

The Chairman: Shall the item carry?

Mr. Howard (Skeena): Mr. Chairman, perhaps I might have some direction. I do not know whether under this vote I may discuss the matter of royal commissions or whether I ought to wait for another occasion.

The Chairman: I think it would be appropriate to deal with that matter under this item.

• (12 noon)

Mr. Howard (Skeena): My remarks will be relatively brief. I suppose that at some time in the past royal commissions served a valuable purpose, but in the last 10 or 15 years they have been considered to be commissions appointed for the purpose of sidetracking complex, controversial or difficult problems. Some of them are spending many years on their deliberations and coming up with worth-while suggestions and recommendations which, because of the political climate and the feeling of the government at the time the report is made, tend to be sidetracked. Neither I nor anyone else apart from the minister knows the extent to which the report of the Carter commission on taxation will be reflected in the budget, but if the present Minister of Finance holds views similar to those of his predecessor the findings of the Carter commission will remain inoperative and the commission will have proved to be a complete waste of the taxpayers money. It will have served no purpose whatever except as a subject of academic conversation.

I turn now to the request in these estimates for \$668,000 for the commission on bilingualism and biculturalism. I look upon this vote as being a further waste of money in addition to the \$5 million or \$6 million which has already been spent on this commission. This commission was appointed in the first instance as a result of a particular political party seeking to gain a political advantage in one of our provinces, namely, the province of Quebec. I do not want any of my remarks to be considered as anti-Quebec or anti-French speaking or anything of that sort, but I believe it is a political fact of life that before the federal elections of 1962 and 1963 the Liberal party was groping desperately for something which would appeal to the electorate in the province of Quebec and finally conceived the idea of a royal commission on bilingualism and biculturalism. The origin was political. As a matter of fact, as I said earlier in this house, I fail to see how there