

*The Constitution*

likelihood is that that motion will carry about six hours from now and that the matter will be sent to the special joint committee. My plea is that we have had enough contention, acrimony and backbiting both ways, and that the time has come for us to send this whole proposition to the committee in a spirit of good will, with the plea that it approach the job with the seriousness which it deserves.

Maybe I am dreaming something that cannot happen but I would like to see this motion passed tonight without a recorded vote as the means of saying to the committee, "We have done our fighting, we have done our arguing, we have had our contentions; now it is up to the committee to do the job on the proposed resolution which needs to be done."

I want to say that my colleagues and I are prepared to support the amendment proposed this afternoon to give the committee additional time to do its job, and I hope that the government might consider accepting that amendment. It might even be that with a little investigation it could be found that the official opposition would be willing to let the motion go to committee without a recorded vote if the amendment were accepted.

I say all of this, Mr. Speaker, because I believe I reflect the thinking of the Canadian people about the September conference, namely, that it was a crying shame that 11 grown-up men sitting down together could not reach agreement on the proposal for a new constitution, but instead broke up in a way which has led to an increasing sense of division in the country. I think there was hope on the part of the people of Canada that the 282 of us—we are only 279 now since there are a few vacancies—might be grownup men and women and might be able to do the job where the premiers failed. But instead we have had three weeks of pretty contentious debate ending today under a vote with respect to closure. I regret very much that we are doing it this way.

● (1910)

In my experience, every time Standing Order 33 is invoked it produces a feeling of discontent, unhappiness and ill-will around this place that does no good for the parliamentary process. It is a rule that has been around for a long time. Its conception and birth were highly questionable. It was brought in in 1913 by the Conservative government of the day because it was having trouble getting a naval aid bill through Parliament. Because it had so much trouble with those filibustering Liberals, it stopped the debate, brought in changes in the rule, then went back to the debate and applied the new rules. We often use the phrase about changing the rules in the middle of the game. It was not just a phrase in 1913, it was an actuality. As I say, the few times it has been used since it has produced ill-will and unhappiness.

In particular, I remember the experience in 1956 in the pipeline debate when it was applied four times. Four times we sat here until two, three or four o'clock in the morning in what was a dramatic part of the history of this Parliament but really a very sad one. I can assert that we have never got over some of the damage done to this place by the use of closure in 1956.

We have had it a few times since then. It was used with respect to the flag debate. On that occasion, like today, my party was prepared to vote for the motion with respect to the new flag, but we voted against the attempt to close that debate by closure. It was brought in again in 1969. Closure was used again that year to bring in those other debate-ending rules, 75A, 75B and 75C.

I believe members will agree with me that even the normal relationships and greetings we give to each other in the lobbies and around this building have been cooled today because of closure and the kind of experience we are having. I feel very strongly that if we had just negotiated a bit more, a few days more, even a week or what have you, we could have closed this debate without using the guillotine.

If I speak critically of the government for invoking closure, I must say there is blame on the other side as well. Progressive Conservatives members have tried to use arithmetic to show they have not had as many speeches in the debate as the Liberals, but they are the ones who refused to agree to any proposal to bring the debate to a close voluntarily. We have heard from them scathing denunciations of the package before the House as though it would bring Canada to an end, as though good will was completely absent from the minds of those who drafted the resolution. We have had a great deal of the kind of debate which does not enhance the reputation of this Parliament or expedite its proceedings. All right, we have had it. We cannot go back and undo it. Things have been said which I hope some members are sorry for. It has been done, but that is over now. It will end at one o'clock tonight or one o'clock tomorrow morning. Is it not time for us to realize that we are dealing with a terribly important issue, namely, the basic constitution of this country, and that we should send this matter to a joint committee, calling upon it in good will and in good faith to try to come up with a document which will meet the needs and the wishes of the country?

My leader has made our position very clear on a number of occasions. He has pointed out that after all the years Canada has been here, the 113 years or even the 53 years since an attempt was made to Canadianize the constitution, surely there comes a time when the matter should be taken in hand and we should go through with it. We accept the proposition that we should now try to go through with that job, but I think it should be recognized not just as a job handed to us by the government. It is something in which all sides of the House should co-operate as helpfully and as constructively as we possibly can. Not only do we feel there is a case for doing the job now and getting it over with; perhaps the most common remark I get from people in my constituency and other parts of the country is: "Why do you not get the job over with?"

In addition to that, we think there are some things in the package which are good. Most of us believe in the entrenchment of a charter of rights. Most of us believe that language justice should be entrenched in our charter. We all say we believe in the principle of equalization. These things really ought to be part of a constitution. So why should we be