

*Private Members' Business*

very seriously at making the Government of Canada more accountable to the people of this country.

I say, unlike the member from the Conservative Party, that this institution is not working, that Parliament is not working, that there is a failure of this institution to respond to the needs of the people of this country. Our party, because of that, has established an action group to go across this country to try to get ideas from the Canadian people as to how to reform the Parliament of Canada to make it more responsible to the people of this country.

I find, for example, that a majority government in this country does not seem to work. It does not respond to the wishes of the people. In an election that is held today in terms of the issue of the day might be fiction in about two years time. We have a system in this country of responsible government which in theory is very good, but I ask the question of responsible for whom. Is it good enough to have an election every four or five years? I suggest it is not good enough to have an election every four or five years. A responsible government today is responsible not just to the people of this country but responsible in the main to the government side of the House and the majority Parliament in the House of Commons and that is not good enough.

The motion today by the member from Calgary is one on referenda. I am not sure whether or not he goes too far when he says there has to be a citizen initiated referendum that will be binding on the government as well as referenda initiated by the government itself. I think we should take a serious look at that proposition. We should debate the pros and cons to see whether or not this is one of the reforms to our parliamentary system. It is perhaps an idea that is much more popular in western Canada than it is in eastern Canada.

The Liberal and Conservative parties both put forward a spokesman from Ontario. If you look historically in this country, there have been since Confederation some 42 referenda conducted by provincial governments. Some 31 of them had been conducted in the four western provinces, three in the province of Ontario, two in the province of Quebec, and six in Atlantic Canada. Historically they have been used much more frequently in western Canada, perhaps because of the alienation or the grievance that many western Canadians feel about the central government and Parliament.

On the national level a referendum has been used on only two occasions. One of them was back in 1898 in terms of the prohibition of liquor. The other one was on conscription in 1942.

There are many recent examples as to why we must examine the effectiveness of our parliamentary system. We have, for example, a goods and services tax that most Canadians oppose strenuously but feel very helpless to do anything about because the government says it has mandate and, come hell or high water, that goes through regardless of the consequences.

We had a Meech Lake process. I supported very strongly the substantive part of Meech Lake which the members of this House know. The process of negotiation, which is not entirely the fault of this government but was inherited in many ways from the previous Liberal government, is a process that is too secretive. It is a process that is restricted to too few people. It is a process that must be opened up.

We also have in this parliamentary system of ours a Senate which is not democratically elected, a Senate where the Prime Minister can use an archaic constitutional provision, section 36 of our Constitution, and swamp the Senate with eight additional senators, something that is highly undemocratic.

On the other hand, there can be a majority in the Senate or a minority, as is now the case, that can override the wishes of the elected House. On either count, I do not think that is a proper way to go. We have had a situation this summer where we have also sent Canadian troops to the Persian Gulf, into a potential war zone without the recalling of Parliament. The Persian Gulf, the GST, the Meech Lake process, and the Senate are examples of why we need some reform to make this Parliament more sensitive to the wishes of the Canadian people.

We have to look at issues of whether or not we need a second House. Do we need an elected Senate? What power should that Senate have? Should we, for example, have in this country fixed election days so that government cannot manipulate an agenda to its purposes and forget about the purposes of the nation as a whole? Do we in this country need to have a look at proportional representation so that different points of view can be