

Government Orders

Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, a question for Yellowhead in Alberta, a good question for Quebec, a good question for Toronto, a good question for the north, for Halifax, for everywhere in the country, because we are facing a time when we have to answer that question.

What is it that this country wants? We know our history. As the Prime Minister outlined with such eloquence today in the House of Commons, it has been a history that, of course, has been marked by differences, divisions, and very often, by danger.

We know that history. And we know that we have formed out of that history a quite extraordinary society, a society that is marked as almost no other in the world is, by a tradition of diversity, a capacity to reflect a wide range of cultures and traditions here within the context of one nation. But how does that apply to the world we are facing now? I think those are questions which should not be looked at as constitutional questions because they are not narrowly constitutional. Those are questions about who we are as a country. Of course it is important that parliamentarians address those questions, as all of us do, but it is also important that the people of Canada, whose country this is, have the opportunity in a formal, organized way to address those kinds of questions. This process is not simply to travel the country.

The Prime Minister made it abundantly clear that this is not a royal commission like others. Other royal commissions hear briefs by formal groups, bear presentations to government. What this is designed to do is to make it more possible, to encourage individual Canadians to speak with other individual Canadians; people who may not have met one another before, people who come from different cultures and people who have different ways of looking at the country. This commission is not to celebrate or to deepen our differences, but to find ways by bringing together the quite remarkable diversity of this country, we can define what kind of nation we want to have by the year 2000, what kind of nation we want to have as we face the extraordinary new challenges the world poses to all civilized societies.

If I may revert to my role as the foreign minister of the country, that is important to us, and we should never forget it in this House. It is also fundamentally important to other peoples in the world.

The Prime Minister evoked that great Irish poet, Robbie Burns—

An hon. member: With a Scottish accent.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): Well, I thought I could get away with a bit of humour, but I see that I have as much luck in the House as I do in the cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that other countries of the world take great confidence from the success Canada has made of bringing together diversity. Indeed, there is no question that if we continue the role of leadership that is open to us, both practical leadership, the kind of which I speak, and moral leadership, of the kind which others in the House speak of more often, our capacity for that kind of leadership will extend quite dramatically if we are capable of continuing and extending into the new world of the future the quite remarkable ability to bring together differences that we have here. Nor is this process designed simply to be about constitutions, which are formal things. What this is designed to do is encourage Canadians to think about the kind of country we want our constitutions to reflect and to express.

There will be times for constitutional discussion. There will be times for lawyers. This is a time for ordinary Canadians who have views about their country to think what those views should be and about what the country should be and try to find some ways in which we can come together. We face fundamental historic challenges, as we always have, in relation to French and English speaking Canadians. Those have always been serious and they are now. They are a great challenge.

The debate is larger now. The debate is also a debate, not simply about the role of Canadians of French or English speaking origin in this country, but also the role of Canadians of other origins. To an increasing degree it is a debate, at least from my part of the country, about how different regions can find their expression and find their future and find a sense of continuing identification in their country, Canada.