

The Constitution

[Translation]

As we can see, the federal government has no intention of taking any power away from the provinces. During the recent discussions, the provinces wanted to negotiate these rights. I say that these rights are not negotiable. They belong to the men and women of Canada, and we must leave them what is theirs. It is now time to repatriate the constitution, with an amending formula, including every guarantee of the rights binding the federal and provincial governments, and to have a greater willingness to listen to those around us and to understand their needs. There is a need for greater generosity toward others. These factors are all equally important to the unity of the nation. Surely this is easy to understand. This is what we want for Canada. According to the opposition, it is an artificial Canada that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) envisions and would have us accept. Canada is a reality, and the hopes of Canadians are equally real.

The dream I spoke of earlier is one shared by all Canadian men and women—that of having all the freedoms and all the basic rights that we are believed to possess already in Canada. The provincial premiers are also agreed that we possess these rights. I can repeat the Prime Minister's question: if we have them now, why would they not want to entrench them in the constitution?

Last week, Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively as a member of the Opposition said that the Prime Minister was planting a time bomb in the very heart of the country and was preparing to demolish the Canadian federation. Well, I refuse to accept such a statement, which I consider an insult to the people of Canada, because the Prime Minister is one of the greatest men of Quebec and of Canada, regardless of what the opposition may think.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is one of our own, and no one can deny that, through his efforts, the position of Francophones has greatly improved. What is there to say about the adoption of the Official Languages Act, about the integration of Francophones at all levels of the public service across Canada? Through the force of his ideas and the firmness of his convictions, he has won the hearts of Quebecers and has led them toward the kind of renewed federalism that is envisioned in this proposal.

● (2210)

[English]

The hour of decision has arrived. After 53 years, we are about to take the historic steps of bringing our constitution home, and giving all Canadians the rights, not privileges as some premiers would have it, that they deserve. That will be our legacy to future generations of Canadians, and that is why I will proudly vote in favour of the government's resolution before us tonight.

[Translation]

Politicians have now been trying to patriate the constitution for 53 years and all have failed. Now is the time to decide. We are going to take that decision and for the first time in our history the freedoms and fundamental rights of Canadians will be enshrined in a Canadian charter. We owe it to ourselves to patriate the Canadian constitution made in Canada by Canadians. We have the power and the duty to do so.

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I participate in this debate with a degree of sadness and regret having regard to the fact that we have just had thrust upon this House one of the most repugnant and most destructive devices ever perpetrated on the democratic process. I am deeply saddened, because the debate that has taken place in this chamber for the last 24 hours interspersed over a couple of weeks or so is perhaps the most important historic debate I have ever witnessed in my 12 years as a member of the House. It is with a great deal of regret that I see it cut off prematurely having regard to its importance and the fact that some members who wanted to speak will not have that opportunity.

The government's action is the result of a move that is ruthless, arrogant and, I believe, cowardly. Parliament is now succumbing, as the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) has said, to the tyranny of the majority. The excellent debate we have had so far is coming to an end. There have been many excellent speeches made in this chamber. It is perhaps the best debate I have ever witnessed in my 12 years here. Many of the speeches have been delivered with deep conviction, deep feeling and in a sincere manner. But the government's actions have turned the debate into one of bitterness and division; the atmosphere has become poisoned.

It seems to me there is a pattern in the way in which this government has approached constitutional reform. It is treating this House in the same way as it treated the premiers. It has ignored the warnings and the legitimate grievances which have been expressed by members on both sides of the House. The government has ignored the participation of the members who have spoken with such deep conviction and with such deep feeling. This government, it is very clear, thrives on confrontation. This is not in keeping with the Canadian tradition or the spirit of confederation.

I feel very badly and very deeply about this kind of atmosphere, and it should not be prevalent when we are dealing with such a basic fundamental and important issue. We must ask ourselves, "Why the haste all of a sudden?" We hear from members opposite that the process has been ongoing for 53 years and suddenly, bang, it comes to an end. Several members have quoted from the infamous secret document that was leaked, the document that was for ministers' eyes only. There are a couple of points contained in that document which should be put on the record. The first deals with the concern the government felt over the provinces taking the matter to court. Their considered opinion is summarized in a couple of points which I would like to put on the record: