

*The Constitution*

His committee has the right to travel. It is considering the problems of the handicapped. Why, if the people of Canada are allowed to be heard on the problems of the handicapped, should they not be allowed to be heard on the question of the basic law of the land? Why is the attempt being made to limit that debate to this city?

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Clark:** I say simply, in passing, that there are two regions in particular where this refusal to have the committee travel would be deeply dangerous. It would be deeply dangerous in Atlantic Canada because, as my hon. friend from Hillsborough has indicated, this proposal would wipe out to all intents and purposes the influence of the province of Prince Edward Island. Indeed, it proposes to confer upon other provinces in Atlantic Canada a second-class status. It proposes to smuggle through a reference to equalization that is a most inadequate reference. And the people of that region, people who do not have the money to travel to Ottawa to make their views known on the constitution, should not be forced to remain silent because they cannot afford to come to speak to their Parliament about their constitution. They should have the right to have their constitution debated in their region. And the same is true for the west. I will return to the west in a moment because I am deeply concerned about what is happening now in western Canada as a result of various initiatives of this government.

In the west, in particular, there have been dramatic and dangerous changes in attitude toward this Canadian confederation. In the last eight to nine months there has been a dangerous development of feeling against the country developing in that region. Liberal members of Parliament, I believe, who voted for closure would not support that measure if they had the opportunity to hear directly from the people of western Canada some of the concerns that are on the minds of the people in western Canada. I say to my colleagues in the House of Commons who come from other parts of the country that they owe it to their country, they owe it to the ability of their country to continue, not to sit here in splendid isolation in Ottawa. But they should travel so that they can hear first-hand the advice of concerned Canadians who are now falling victim, falling prey to the siren song of separatism because of the actions that have been taken by this government.

● (1810)

Before you aggravate that situation, those of you who come from other parts of Canada, who are members of a majority government which has no seats in half of the geographic land mass of this country, you owe it to your country and to yourselves to go out and hear what the people of western Canada have to say about the constitutional proposal. What we need is parliamentary public debate here in the House of Commons and across the country.

We have been denied that debate in the House of Commons but we should not put unreasonable, destructive limits upon the committee of the House of Commons and the Senate

which will consider this matter because if we gag that body, if we allow the manipulative work of the Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming) to affect opinion across the country, and if we leave it to propaganda and leave the truth aside, then we are dealing very seriously with possible ruptures in our country. I say to members of this House of Commons, from whatever corner they may come, you should not be prepared to allow your blind loyalty to your leader to force you to take actions which might rend this country.

I had harsh words a moment ago for members of the New Democratic Party. I will certainly amend them in one case. I am delighted to learn that the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) announced this afternoon that he will be opposing the Liberal government's motion to send the proposed constitutional package to committee. I see that the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) is in the House of Commons. I heard him speak on section 42, and he believes that it would be destructive to the nation. I would hope that he will find in his heart that it is his duty to act as his colleague, the hon. member for Burnaby, did, and stand against this attempt to ramrod through the House of Commons and into a controlled committee the discussion of the nation's future.

The amendment proposed by my colleague, the hon. member for Carleton-Charlotte (Mr. McCain), is one further attempt by my party to open up the process so that the people of Canada can be heard and can study the issue. Yesterday we gave this House of Commons the opportunity to end some of the bitterness and to achieve some of the goals that surround this debate. The goal is to get our constitution home. Yesterday, we provided a means to allow Parliament to vote to bring it home. The Liberal party and the NDP voted against bringing our constitution home. We wanted our constitution home in a way that we could work with it in an atmosphere that would be constructive.

Instead, as my colleague from Victoria has said, we run the risk of an atmosphere that is deeply divisive. As he said, a constitution is not simply a piece of law, a constitution reflects the mentality and the essence of a country. This government by its actions and by acquiescing to closure is poisoning the atmosphere of this country, and we will not have a solid constitution emerge from a poisoned country.

We want the committee's considerations to be open. We want it to travel, and we hope that there will be a willingness on the part of the Liberal members, as there is in the NDP and in our party, to have television and radio in that committee. We hope that the Prime Minister will not try to hide the discussions on the constitutional package from the people of Canada. Indeed, had it been in order—unfortunately it is not because of the narrow range of our rules—we would have allowed the House of Commons the right to vote upon having television and radio in committee so that the people of Canada could know what is being proposed.

The reason that closure is upon this House is very simple. The Government of Canada does not want the people of Canada to know what it is proposing to do with the constitution. The reason that closure was rushed in so quickly, at a