

Government Orders

must truly reflect the views of all those Canadians who have appeared before the commission.

This must not simply be an opportunity for people to blow off some steam while the real work is done by the Prime Minister once again behind closed doors. We need a serious dialogue if we are to get out of the malaise now gripping the country, the malaise the government has been unable to contain, and in fact for which it has been a major contributor.

A constitution is both a political statement and a legal document. It is more than just a piece of paper. A constitution embodies and reflects the shared values of our society. It sets out the legal framework for the structure of our society. Unlike labour and business agreements which have limited terms and can easily be changed, constitutions are difficult to change once made, as they should be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, those who deal with fundamental values and political institutions, and try to preserve our society's most sensitive balance, must act with careful consideration. These changes are meant to last a long time. We must write them properly before adopting them and not the other way around. If there are errors in the draft resolution, it would be irresponsible not to correct them before the changes become effective.

[*English*]

Canadians want more than a travelling constitutional road show. They want a chance to be heard even after that commission is finished. No more secret meetings, no more secret deals, and no more manipulation and intimidation. Canadians want this Prime Minister to listen to them. They want meaningful reform.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, this time, the Canadian people will be called upon to play an active and constructive role.

[*English*]

This time the concerns of all Canadians—our aboriginal peoples, women, people of every origin—and the concerns of all our regions must be reflected in any decisions taken by governments.

We must never forget that constitutional reform must, above all, have the goal of preserving our country and thereby improving the well-being of all Canadians. It must reaffirm the values shared by Canadians wherever they live in this great land. It must help us all to achieve the goal of social justice that makes up the very core of the Canadian identity.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, we are strongly committed to our principles as Liberal and as Canadians. We are proud to be Canadians and we will promote our concept of Canada across the country.

But, Mr. Speaker, Canada is not static. The Liberal Party of Canada has understood this for a long time, despite what our opponents say. The Liberal Party has never been and will never be in favor of the status quo.

Mr. Speaker, our institutions must change, adapt and improve.

[*English*]

In the words of Jean Chrétien, the Leader of the Liberal Party, the solutions we seek should respect at least three fundamental principles.

First, they must be compatible with the very nature of Canada which finds its *raison d'être* in sharing, diversity, and respect for the rights of individuals.

Second, they must result in the reform of our political institutions, including the Senate, to ensure that the distinct concerns of our four great regions, the Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, and the west, are respected.

Third, they must favour the renewal and modernization of our economy to create economic policies that will allow us to be competitive in the world of tomorrow.

In summary, and by way of conclusion, the process announced by the Prime Minister today is fraught with both opportunity and danger. The process of last spring ultimately failed because the people of Canada felt like mere observers, rather than full participants in that constitutional process. Surely the message of the events of last spring is that constitutions cannot be made behind closed doors in this country.