

● (1740)

[English]

We have seen some battles here in the past. We have seen all kinds of confrontations between Quebecers and English Canadians. When for years Quebecers were calling themselves French-Canadians or Canadiens, the rest of the people of Canada were calling themselves British subjects or British citizens. Maybe after so long Quebecers decided they wanted to identify themselves with something closer to them, and then started identifying themselves as Québécois. If we had not waited so long to adopt our Canadian Citizenship Act, and to start identifying ourselves as Canadians, maybe Quebecers would not have seen that necessity.

We have seen the fight for a Canadian flag when people on both sides of this House voted for or against it. We can remember that great flag debate when the Quebec caucus was fighting so that Canada would adopt its own flag, because after a hundred years, French Canadians could not identify themselves with a flag they did not relate to: the Red Ensign or the Union Jack. No, we have to wait a hundred years for our flag. Quebecers, after waiting so long, decided in the early fifties that they wanted their own flag because they needed something they could relate to.

During the referendum, Quebecers started flying the Canadian flag, and I think they have been flying it for a long time, because they realize that it is their flag and they have an attachment to it.

We have to ensure that this Canadianization continues. We saw the example last summer of our national anthem. Once again Quebecers had to be ahead. They had to sing "O Canada" long before the rest of Canada, which was singing "God Save the King" or "God Save the Queen". Quebecers were perhaps bored with that, and started singing national songs in Quebec. During the referendum, we saw that Quebecers wanted to identify themselves as Canadians.

[Translation]

Canadians had placed great hopes in the negotiations scheduled for the premiers' constitutional conference last fall. We all wished that those in attendance would reach a consensus on the different items on the agenda. After the failure of this conference, I would have liked to see the provinces try once more to come to an agreement with the federal government, to put forward a proposed resolution unanimously agreed to by all of them.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we found out that the provincial premiers were having some difficulty in coming to an agreement and, by the way they never even reached a consensus on anything. Whether it was about going to London, or the amending formula, or any formula at all, the only thing to which they agreed unanimously was their opposition to the federal proposal. Surely, this negative attitude of provincial "partisanship" will not help build a better Canada!

The Government of Canada is acting in the interests of the people of all Canada and in order to move forward along the

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constitutional path, they are seeking the authorization of Parliament, which represents the Canadian people. I want to give them that support and I urgently ask my colleagues of the Progressive Conservative Party to set aside their partisan views and join with the New Democratic Party and Liberal members in giving their unconditional support to this proposal, so that we may go ahead with the constitutional reform.

[English]

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, may I say there have been the necessary discussions, and I believe you will find that the House will agree to sit a few minutes beyond six o'clock if necessary so that our friend, the hon. member for Nunatsiak (Mr. Ittinuar), can complete his speech.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Peter Ittinuar (Nunatsiak): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief.

Mr. Knowles: Take your time.

Mr. Ittinuar: Mr. Speaker, my friend, the hon. Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien), likes to say, when he speaks of the natives in the Constitution, "together we will build a great nation". He said this yesterday, and I would like to follow up on his response and explain how we could build a great nation.

As we all know, this is a critical period in Canadian history. As usual, I am pleased and honoured to be a participant in the debate on the Canadian Constitution. I am particularly happy because this is a significant time in the long history of the aboriginal peoples of Canada. We have a responsibility to see that consideration is given to the interests of all Canadians, but I will be speaking specifically to the issue of entrenching aboriginal rights in the Constitution of Canada. The significance of this, as I said earlier, cannot be overstated.

When I spoke in the House last fall, I was fairly despondent about the future of aboriginal rights in Canada. The first draft of the constitutional resolution was a serious blow to us in our long fight for legal and political recognition of our rights as original inhabitants. It appeared that all our voices had fallen on deaf ears. A constitution without affirmation of our rights signalled the beginning of the end for us as distinct peoples within confederation.

At the time, Britain seemed the only avenue for change open to us. However, we pressed very hard to have our positions heard at the joint committee on the Constitution. I believe, for once, members of that committee listened. We owe a great debt to those people who came in good faith, facing what looked like impossible odds, to make the case they have tried to make so many times before.

When the Minister of Justice introduced amendments to the resolution on January 13, our hopes for recognition were dampened, dampened by amendments which fell disappointingly short of entrenchment. Native people were united in their belief that the amendments were not nearly enough to protect our cultures and lifestyles and to secure our future within confederation. We redoubled our efforts to achieve this last