

*Government Orders*

Interestingly enough, to date, only Jean Chrétien, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada—and the only leader of a national party to do so—will be making a presentation to the Bélanger-Campeau Commission.

[*Translation*]

I am extremely proud of this initiative on the part of the leader of my party and I commend him for that.

[*English*]

In looking at the Spicer commission, we recognize that it has received, to be kind, less than positive reviews. One journalist has called it useless. Another has described it as out of control and disorganized. There are many other descriptors that I could use. One newspaper headline reads: "Citizens Forum Becoming a Joke".

I want to quote what the Leader of the Opposition said with respect to this particular commission. He has identified the critical issue when he said about the Spicer commission that "if it does not get to work soon with a full complement of members, it is going to lose credibility and that would be too bad because—we felt it was a way of making up for a real gap in the previous Constitution discussion, that is, giving Canadians a chance to be heard."

I think that that is in fact the issue with respect to the Spicer commission. It has been set up, but certainly to date, it has been short of accomplishments.

[*Translation*]

I am glad that two persons have now been appointed to fill the forum's two vacant seats. Unfortunately the reports I have had seem to indicate that one of the commissioners has yet to take active participation in the work of this forum which might prove to be very important for Canada.

[*English*]

The question that we need to raise is why has the government decided to set up a special committee of the Senate and the House of Commons. First and foremost—and we have to be very honest about this—this committee is a response to criticism. There is no question about it. It is a response to the Bélanger-Campeau commission in Quebec which I have identified as working particularly well. I also noted that the Spicer commission was not working effectively yet. I hope it finally gets its act together.

It is also a response to the Prime Minister's failure with respect to the constitutional process and the Meech Lake Accord. If he had been successful we would not be having such a joint committee right now.

That begs another question. Why did the Prime Minister fail? Canadians were wondering what the objectives of his initiative really were. We all wanted to ensure that Quebec was brought into the constitutional fold and that it would be a signatory to that particular document. As Canadians, we wanted that. Most Canadians wanted that.

Because of the lack of credibility of the Prime Minister with respect to a number of promises that he has made, people were wondering whether or not there were other objectives. That started to affect the process in a very negative way.

It was also a flawed process. There have been comments from every part of Canada from virtually every group. We do not have to go through the "dark night and 12 men behind closed doors" routine again. It was not an adequate process. Canadians felt left out. Because they felt left out, they became extremely suspicious of what was happening.

There could have been meaningful, public consultations on the Meech Lake Accord, but the government contended that it was a seamless web that could not be undone. I recognize that there were some consultations, but the problem is that once you say that it is a seamless web and that it cannot be undone, you are in a sense contradicting yourself. People say: "What is the use? This is a charade. This is not a sincere attempt to try to find out what Canadians are thinking."

There should have been more meaningful consultations along the way whenever a new step had been reached. There should have been continuing consultation, and it did not happen.

I will give an example of what occurred after supposedly having had a seamless web and after supposedly being unable to change whatever was necessary. As time ran out and as the Prime Minister and his government became concerned, suddenly the government changed its tune. It said that it might, in fact, accept a companion accord. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you will recall that it set up the Charest committee. It came out with its report but, for the most part, its recommendations were ignored.