

within the terms of reference laid down for it by this House. That order does not permit the committee to travel in Canada.

In view of the petitions, questions, and representations which have been made, and in view of the invocation of closure on the debate after a very small percentage of hon. members of this House had an opportunity to participate, thereby depriving many regions of the country and the vast majority of the constituencies of Canada of the opportunity to be directly represented in the debate on the most important issue of the constitution, perhaps the most important issue to come before Parliament this century, I would ask the government House leader whether the government is now prepared to issue an order permitting that committee to travel from place to place in Canada, through all the provinces and territories, in order that the people who were not represented in the debate through their members will have a chance to appear.

[Translation]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, on October 6, when Parliament was reconvened, the member was aware of the content of the motion. And his party chose to extend this first stage to three weeks, thus shortening accordingly the committee stage. Now, Madam Speaker, on the first point, since this is a quiet Friday, I may remind the Conservative members that they chose to shorten the time in committee by taking more time in the House. May I also add, on this quiet Friday, that if his party had agreed to our offer to sit between six and eight o'clock on Thursday and Monday, and from ten o'clock to midnight on Thursday and Monday, and also on Monday and Tuesday last, an offer which I made to his party, more members could have taken part in the debate. This must also appear on the record and be thoroughly understood by the right-minded members on this quiet Friday.

As to his question whether the committee will travel, I will tell him frankly and as directly as possible that the answer is no. Several committees have travelled across the country to deal with the constitutional issue in the last few years. During the Quebec referendum campaign last spring, several members, even some of his party, campaigned on Canadian unity and made the headlines in all newspapers and media throughout the country. The intentions of the people have been sounded. They have been sensitized. That is why the committee has been set up. It is because I respect my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), that I am telling him why the deadline for the committee report is December 9. The very essence, the very reason for the creation of the committee stage as part of our approach and procedure is to allow the committee to consider the technical amendments which may be proposed to polish and improve, if there is room for improvement, the resolution which is relatively complex.

In conclusion, I would say that we could very well have tabled the resolution right in Parliament. It would have been a

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simple motion, a single stage, a single phase and, given all the obligations it has to meet, the House would have had to study it clause by clause. Given his vast experience of the House of Commons, my knowledgeable colleague knows very well that with 282 members, after three weeks of debate, we would probably still be stuck on clause 2 or clause 3 and considering a number of subamendments. The consequence of that kind of procedure would have been to paralyse the Canadian Parliament altogether, confuse the public and make the debate completely sterile.

The approach we have chosen allows for three stages: a preliminary stage which we had to interrupt yesterday for reasons which have been thoroughly discussed in the last few days, but that was only one stage. We have not ended the debate for good.

There is the committee stage, the purpose of which is not to have the hon. members travel throughout the country to take the nation's pulse. Again, we have very often followed such a procedure in the past few years. The purpose of the committee stage is to further consideration for this institution and to let us, in an orderly way, smooth out the text, and if needs be, to hear a few witnesses liable to provide us with the precisions we might need. And ultimately, there we will be the formal debate, following presentation of the committee report, and this debate technically will not be limited and is not intended to be limited provided that hon. members show the good faith which they have unfortunately not shown at the first stage when they rejected the delay we had suggested.

Therefore, I repeat it: the debate is far from being over. The purpose of the committee is not to travel—I will not come back on this, as I just explained—and there will be a third stage at which point ample time will be given hon. members to hold a responsible debate. In conclusion, I want to clearly indicate to the hon. member that the government will always be prepared to assume its responsibilities as far as parliamentary procedure is concerned to permit this institution to work. It is a matter of judgment. Canadians will pass judgment on us if we do not abide by the rules. However, we are fully aware of the fact that until now, far from having misused the rules, far from having misused the procedure, we have shown great respect for hon. members opposite, for the people and for the procedure in this chamber. And once again, it must be clear that the debate is not yet over, that this is just another stage and that this will allow us to demonstrate to the public at large that Parliament can play its role by discussing the constitution in committee and by dealing with economic matters on the floor of the House.

● (1250)

[English]

Mr. McGrath: I am sorry, Madam Speaker, that my hon. friend's answer was so unnecessarily argumentative and convoluted. Now that we know that this most important joint committee of the Parliament of Canada on Canada's constitu-