

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

### THE CONSTITUTION

RESOLUTION RESPECTING CONSTITUTION ACT, 1981

The House resumed debate on the motion of Mr. Chrétien, seconded by Mr. Roberts, for an Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada, and on the amendment of Mr. Epp, seconded by Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton) that the motion be amended in Schedule B of the proposed resolution by deleting Clause 46, and by making all necessary changes to the schedule consequential thereto.

**Mr. Serge Joyal (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board):** Mr. Speaker, I rise before you today to take part in this debate somewhat like those enthusiastic and fervent pilgrims in the Middle Ages who were returning from Mount Saint-Michel, from the Ganges or from Mecca. During the sittings of the Joint Committee on the Constitution which lasted three months and a half, I had the opportunity to listen, to consider and to ponder on each and every point and objection; I did reconsider freely whether or not I should belong to this country. The witnesses who appeared before the committee did us an invaluable service by allowing its members to get out of their cities and of their villages to learn during all those sitting hours about our historical difficulties and advances, about the many facets of the people of different cultures who inhabit this huge land of ours. How could we thank the 314 individuals who, on behalf of their group, came to openly state their grievances, their expectations, their vision of this country which they would like to see fairer, more generous and more tolerant? The members of the committee had a common characteristic: they were hard working people with a keen sense of responsibility. During the 300 sitting hours the public could appreciate to what extent the members of the committee discharged to the best of their ability and in all honesty, their responsibility to assist the House in making an historic decision. I am grateful to each of them for having shown us the frustrations of Western Canadians as well as the expectation of our founding people that this country will again become a land of brotherhood and sharing. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues in Parliament and to the honourable senators for having entrusted me with those privileged duties which was essentially to help them to the best of my ability discharge their responsibilities.

[*English*]

I should like to thank especially the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) who is in the House today and, of course, the hon. member for Lincoln (Mr. Mackasey), both of whom, on behalf of their parties, have maintained that confidence and that trust in the chairmen. I think if we are in a position today to debate such a proposed resolution, it is due in most part to their respect, their trust and their ability to

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express their opinions in a way which helps the Canadian people.

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

● (1600)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Joyal:** I should now like to share with the House what lessons I have learned. This country, Canada, Mr. Speaker, was not built in ease and euphoria. The French settlers who came in the seventeenth century had to fight against a hostile environment at the cost of hardships difficult to imagine today before taking root in this land. In the eighteenth century, confrontation with a new occupant was a constant source of political tensions.

The rebellion of 1837 and the struggles for a responsible government took up the nineteenth century until confederation. Since 1867, Canada has witnessed a slow and lengthy process of political evolution. Step by step, it has won its autonomy, its independence, its sovereignty. Today, we have come to the last stage of the old era and the start of the new. We now face a choice, a fundamental one. We must decide what kind of country we want to build. That choice cannot be easy or devoid of growing pains. No country in the world has ever won its official independence without difficulty, without debate, without emotion, without passion. Those who would imagine that the Fathers of Confederation conceived the federal union of this country in easy discussions, in social gatherings at Charlottetown or at Quebec should read again those pages of our history. Those who would believe that the people took an active part in the efforts that led to the birth of Canada are totally mistaken. In fact, the public was almost completely excluded.

On November 7, 1864, Antoine Aimé Dorion, the hon. member for Hochelaga, my predecessor in this House, denounced before his electors the secret nature of the confederation debates saying, and I quote:

You already know that a conference was held in Quebec City . . . The highest interests of the country were discussed at meetings held in camera . . . The lack of any official statement on the proceedings of the conference, the complete silence of the ministers of Lower Canada about the details of the coming conference seem to indicate that this measure is to be rushed through without consulting the people, without even giving them time to study its provisions and evaluating its bearing, its effects.

Today, as we debate this resolution, after 300 hours of proceedings under the light of television cameras, after inviting Canadians from every part of Canada to share their views and opinions with us, we certainly cannot make serious comparisons with the procedures followed by our predecessors.

[*English*]

I might add that during the 106 committee sessions the opposition spoke for two thirds of the time as follows: the official opposition used 43 per cent of the time; the New Democratic Party 22 per cent; the Liberal Party 34 per cent.