

prove to the Canadian people that the committee is as serious as it is believed to be, the committee will perhaps save the Canadian Confederation. The purpose of the committee is to go to the people; I am all for it because I believe in democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to visit Manitoba with members of the committee. We went to various places in the province and I was surprised to find out how much social and public organizations were interested in the Committee on the Constitution.

I was told that among the people we met during the trip, close to 1,000 expressed the hope that the Committee on the Constitution would work seriously to achieve a new Constitution, so that Canadians could live in a more united Canada.

I repeat, the survival of Confederation will depend on the activities and findings of this committee, as there is much thought given at the present time to the structure of a new constitution for Canada not only in Quebec but also in the English-speaking provinces. In fact, when we were in Manitoba, social organizations and young people came before us and expressed an opinion as to what tomorrow's Canada should be. It is the reason why I say that this committee is of paramount importance.

I fully agree with my colleagues who attempted to show that certain House committees travel too much during the sittings of the House. I would perhaps approve the idea put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) that it might be desirable to have the committees sit one week every month and the House during the other three weeks. That is a realistic proposal, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, the business of the House must first of all be carried out here, and it is only here that hon. members must make decisions. Out of this debate, the following principle will, I think, emerge: the committees must not have precedence over the House of Commons. Insofar and as long as the House of Commons remains the place where important decisions are made with regard to the country's business, our parliamentary institution will, I believe, be preserved.

I agree with my colleagues that meetings should be held in the provincial capitals. It is obviously impossible to visit all the important localities of each province.

We went to places in Manitoba with a population of approximately 800. Were the purposes of the committee served in this way? Perhaps not directly. Indirectly, however, we did establish contacts with these municipalities and towns.

I agree with the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) who favours visits to large centres. He suggests that a committee team should be allowed to go first in order to inquire and invite people from rural regions to meet the committee members and to submit briefs.

I think it is impossible—and the chairman of the committee probably agrees—to visit the most remote areas of

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each province. In Quebec, for instance, we could sit in Montreal, go to Quebec City and perhaps Chicoutimi.

There are, however, important towns where we should send in advance a team that would meet people, organizations as well as members of various associations and boards of trade in order to urge them to call on us.

My colleague from Peace River said something very important when he asked the House to adopt this procedure. Moreover, according to the hon. member for Wellington, it would save money.

Mr. Speaker, the former chairman of the Committee, the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan), gave the House the assurance that, from now on, he would submit to the House the schedule of travels planned by the Committee. This sets my mind at rest and if the activity of the committees is supervised by the House of Commons, I am not against the motion. I hope that it will not be necessary to vote on the subject.

I hope that the Committee on the Constitution will be reappointed this session and that newspapermen will understand this clearly. This debate does not mean that our party is against the work of the Committee on the Constitution. I would be very disappointed tonight to hear some newsmen say that the purpose of this debate was to demonstrate that the Progressive Conservatives do not support a Committee on the Constitution. The hon. member for Peace River in good faith has called the attention of the House on the mechanisms of the committees of the House, pointing out that we must think of revamping them to make them more efficient. He also asked those responsible for the committees to cut down their travelling expenses whenever possible.

Mr. Ricard: We are the ones who requested the appointment of a Committee on the Constitution.

Mr. Asselin: Yes, I said that before. As my colleague, the member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Ricard) mentioned, it is our party that called for the setting up of a Parliamentary Committee on the Constitution. Therefore we are not here to kill our baby, Mr. Speaker.

Committee chairmen should take into consideration the comments made this morning by the hon. member for Peace River in order to do a good job, while husbanding the taxpayers' money, and report on their activities to the Commons.

If this is the assurance given to us by the former chairman of the Committee, the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville, I am prepared to support the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order. Is the House ready for the question?

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I will be as brief as possible since several members, including the honourable member for Abitibi (Mr. Laprise), have already expressed quite valuable views.