

The Constitution

● (1630)

An hon. Member: The truth would be helpful.

Mr. Epp: You see, Mr. Speaker, these are the realities. I know why the Minister of Justice holds his views firmly, and I do not object to that, but it is important for the people of Canada, looking at this debate at this period of time, that we also look at the facts. I think the Minister of Justice will admit that what I am putting on the floor of the House is, in fact, the matter of the way in which the constitution will operate.

Additionally, we are facing this day a closure motion at a period of time when the government has had more speakers in this debate than the official opposition.

An hon. Member: That is not an argument.

Mr. Epp: I hear that that is not an argument. In other words, what the member, I suppose, is saying is that you could just have government members speaking. Let me convince members opposite of the accuracy of my contention. I shall quote from 3732 of *Hansard* of October 16.

On that occasion the Prime Minister said:

"The Speaker has asked that Parliament return on Monday to begin debate on that resolution. Every member of Parliament from every corner of this land is asked to participate in this historic act."

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), in his television address of that Thursday, wanted every member to participate. And yet we face closure today. At present there have been 21 Conservative speakers who took part in the debate. Those are the facts. I ask members of the government: are you sincere when you say that closure is justified at this stage when you yourselves have had more speakers?

The only conclusion to which I can come is that the Prime Minister has no use for federal-provincial conferences, for the premiers or for the provincial legislatures. The Minister of the Environment (Mr. Roberts) says that federal-provincial conferences are a bother and should be done away with. And now it is the parliamentary debate which is being curtailed. How many members have said that this House should debate this resolution? Yet now we face closure. We face closure even before we go to committee, and the committee is faced with closure on December 9.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Epp: The very memos talk about closure and the negative effect it would have on the House and in the country. The recommendation is in there provisionally at this time, closure of this debate on the Constitution of Canada and the fundamental laws of Canada cannot and should not be used. Putting it in another way, we can see this government, because of its past actions and its negative attitudes toward Parliament, bringing in closure. We have the NDP, those great defenders of democracy! Did you hear so much as a peep today that they object to closure?

An hon. Member: Not a word.

Mr. Epp: Not a word. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) sits mute. He will prostrate himself in front of the Liberals, his present colleagues, and will accept closure in the House and closure in committee.

We have had ten days of debate, and they say closure. I can hardly fathom that the NDP would accept the mess of potage or, as somebody has described it, the mess of potash, that they have received. One thing which I thought I would never see is notice given immediately after a closure motion, that the Leader of the NDP would rise. We heard him give a speech and never object to closure. That is what we saw today. My good friend from Saskatchewan says, "wait". I know they feel uneasy because of the sweetheart deal and because the premier of Saskatchewan today rejected it. He kept it open, but he certainly does not like the deal.

The point is that what we have before us here today is simply a *fait accompli* by the government using its majority and applying closure, and total acquiescence by the NDP.

For example, there is the matter of resources. The NDP and the Liberals now say there is a guarantee. If you look at the first clause in the Prime Minister's letter, why do you need a guarantee on resources? This right is guaranteed in the constitution. Section 109 guarantees non-renewable resources, and section 92.5 guarantees it for the provinces, and the British North America Act amendments of 1930 guarantee it for the three prairie provinces. Who brought the question in doubt? Who questions ownership of resources? It was this Prime Minister. He brought it in doubt. The provinces did not have that doubt, but this Prime Minister has always tried to smuggle in the notion that the provinces should not own the resources. He has used his powers as the Prime Minister to raise doubts in the minds of Canadians. That very doubt today has caused a division which we see in the country. That is the legacy of Pierre Elliott Trudeau right now. That division is his legacy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: At least we win elections.

Mr. Epp: They might win elections, but what is happening to the country?

An hon. Member: You win elections and ruin the country.

Mr. Epp: They are jocular about it, but let me be quite serious about it. What is happening in western Canada is that western Canadians feel deeply alienated right now. They are as good Canadians as any one of you opposite, and they want to stay in the country. There is an old adage: not only must justice be done, it must appear to be done. Right now the appearance of justice as the west sees it is gone. That is the reality. I say to the members very seriously: at your own peril and at the peril of the country you ignore that fact.

In terms of the Vancouver formula there is a point which I wish to make—I mentioned it earlier—that is, that the principle that the provinces are equal must be maintained in any amending formula. That is not the case in the Victoria formula