

Parliament had the responsibility to debate this issue. He also said in his address:

Every member of Parliament from every corner of this land is asked to participate in this historic act.

The question before us then is whether or not participation is only the right to rise and speak, or whether it does not also include the right to change the proposal that in its present form is only tentative in nature. The Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming) put the matter into context when he spoke this morning on the CTV program "Canada A.M." He said in part:

And then when that program has at least been approved in principle you have the right to tell the public about the program and spend some money on explaining it, otherwise how is the public ever going to know.

I am sure that the minister would agree that this House has not yet approved the resolution. Indeed, the government has not put a resolution before the House, but a proposed resolution. There is a notice of motion to strike a joint committee. I believe, at this point in time when Parliament is debating a possible course of action, that what the government is attempting to do is, possibly not to throttle every member here, but to make the point, now, to everyone outside the House, that no matter what argument is raised, legitimately or otherwise, that argument is not valid and that the plan of action has been completed. I think that point was illustrated by the government in the charade at the first ministers' conference through the manner in which it conducted its affairs. That charade is now being transferred into this House.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development): Madam Speaker, on the question of privilege and in answer to the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) who talked about polls, I would simply say that I think it bears no relation to the question of privilege. We were able to answer during oral question period.

Now I should like to speak about the matter of advertising as mentioned by hon. members of the opposition. First of all, I should like to inform the House that the advertising which is referred to was terminated on radio and television on September 8 and that, in addition, as everybody knows, the advertising through billboards will be over this month. It is because of the very nature of that kind of advertising that it will be finished later. As a matter of fact, billboards must be leased for a certain period of time.

But in the very substance of the advertising which was made during the summer, Madam Speaker, absolutely no government position was proposed. If hon. members look objectively at the advertising, they will see that it began after the referendum in Quebec. I recall clearly that on May 21, the day after the referendum, all members present in the House said that the time had come to undertake constitutional changes. All members offered me their best wishes for the work I was undertaking that day, when I was about to leave to visit the

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premiers, and for the summer during which I met with all my colleagues to try and make some progress in constitutional matters and have the consensus of the provinces.

I do not think that anybody here could now accuse us of not doing everything possible during the summer to try to achieve a consensus. During that time we ran some ads. I will not apologize for it. This publicity tried to raise the consciousness of the Canadian people by telling them how important it was to make the constitution a truly Canadian document, how important it was to do this in the wake of the referendum so as to achieve some progress. I do not think that this publicity, at any time, was aimed at selling a point of view. For instance, during the debate in the House, we said that it was extremely important to patriate the constitution. Every member of this House, including the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), agrees that we must patriate the constitution. All parties agree that if we patriate the Canadian constitution we need an amending formula, without which we could not amend the constitution. To say that is important at this time to have—

● (1530)

[English]

An hon. Member: We listened to you.

Mr. Clark: We spoke the truth.

An hon. Member: You tripped over it.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I understood that you had directed members of the House to deal with the question of privilege. I thought that you narrowed that down quite nicely, just before the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) spoke, and requested members to speak about the merits, the motivation, and what have you. I thought that the hon. member for Provencher respected your ruling, and I would respectfully request that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) address his remarks to the question of privilege raised and put in a draft motion by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath).

Madam Speaker: Order, please. It is always the hope of the Chair that at some point some arguments will elucidate the real question of privilege. The Chair often has to be patient with certain speakers in order to ascertain whether that is going to be the case. I would expect that the hon. minister has heard the remarks of his colleague, and that in order to help the Chair he will try to restrict himself to the reasons for which he feels there is or is not privilege.

Mr. Chrétien: Madam Speaker, that is exactly what I was doing. I was explaining the nature of the publicity, and telling hon. members and the Chair that there was nothing in that publicity that was partisan. It was the goal that the House of Commons was pursuing at that time, in order to have constitutional reform come quickly and effectively to Canada. I do not think that the privileges of members have been affected. We told Canadians there was a problem and that the problem should be solved quickly.