

National Capital of Canada

enough that they have influence with the government in Quebec City.

[Translation]

And that is another story altogether. How can one think for just a moment that at this point the Quebec government would agree to part with one single square centimetre of Quebec territory along the Ottawa River, so that it would become part and parcel of the national capital? In my opinion, it would never agree to that. Even if people really wanted it, they would elect somebody else. After all, the people in Hull elected a PQ candidate the last time around. Perhaps they would elect two now. Then, would these people reflect the opinion of the public as expressed by the Liberal member for Hull (Mr. Isabelle), would they want a national capital, an integrated city, for we would require an integrated city, not a city or a region or a capital divided in two? Unless the Ontario and Quebec governments agreed on the need to provide comparable joint services, a great deal more still has to be done. As to the natural site of the capital, I share the feelings of the hon. member, just as many others would, but for the time being, I am afraid that, however attractive this proposal may seem, it seems that the Canadian people elsewhere in Canada would have also to agree to this change.

You cannot imagine, Mr. Speaker, how many letters I have received from people protesting against the transfer of federal buildings from this side to the Hull side, in order to establish unilaterally the fact that Ottawa-Hull had become the capital of Canada. And I might say that most protesters supported the political party of the hon. member. Those people said, "Definitely not, not that way, give us another plan". But it is the same thing today with the constitution. People are quite willing to patriate the constitution: We would like to have the constitution. But no group has the right to say: "You are going to act this way and that way and not otherwise." The decision belongs to the people of Canada.

The national capital belongs to the people of Canada just as the chief of state, the Queen belongs to the people, and the people will not be ordered around by a prime minister or an administration passing legislation or resolutions here in Parliament or obtaining the consent of the country at large. The constitution is the people's consent to a legislative program. It does not amount to voting a body of legislation, to imposing something on the people. That is the difference and that is what the people of Canada would require in such a situation: Do not impose change, seek to obtain it and you will probably get it. But at the present time, I am afraid the hon. member went astray by trying to amend the British North America Act to change the description of the capital of this country. And I regret it very much, since I know the hon. member very well, and I see his objective is worth while, but he did not make his case. I could not support such a bill.

[English]

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, let me say I support the principle of this bill, which is what we are debating at second reading, presented by the hon. member for Hull (Mr. Isabelle). I have long felt that we should have a national capital district or region in Canada similar to those which exist in other countries, such as the United States or Australia, whereby the national capital region includes all the territory on which the capital exists as well as the surrounding area.

● (1740)

On my first trip to Ottawa some 21 years ago I could see Parliament from almost any part of the city. It was a beautiful sight. Today it is obliterated by high rise office buildings and complexes. It has become nothing more than part of the usual North American downtown concentration. When I returned for our one hundredth birthday in 1967, the obliteration had commenced. When I came here as a member of Parliament in 1968, there were certain regulations and bylaws concerning the height of buildings and their location in relation to Parliament Hill, as it is known. Year after year, various loopholes were found by developers and people whose taste was all in their mouths and who were more interested in making bucks than they were in the beauty and value of a real national capital city.

I am sure the hon. member realizes that the chances of this bill being accepted by the government, or of succeeding in this way only, are almost nil, but at least he has made an effort. At this time of the year I wish he had put forward as well another private member's bill similar to the one brought forward by the former member for Waterloo-Cambridge to allow the Turks and Caicos Islands to become part of Canada so we could have Parliament sit there in the wintertime. The weather there is somewhat better than it is here.

I believe that if we were to negotiate with the provinces of Ontario and Quebec and if there were concurrent resolutions put forward in other legislatures in Canada, we could succeed in acquiring the area which encompasses the lands of the National Capital Commission for the creation of a real national capital district similar to the District of Columbia in the United States and similar to districts in a number of other countries and for the construction of a completely new national capital.

The hon. member for Hull, the good doctor, is not trying to dismember the country or to cause any separatism in this small area of Canada. I do not know whether he is a surgeon, but he is trying to build something which would add to national unity and national identity, and we support that. I hope he will continue to try to convince one or more members of the national assembly of Quebec to sponsor a bill or a resolution in that legislative body, one or more members of the Ontario legislature to do the same, as well as a member of the federal Parliament so that this bill or resolution could deal with many of the problems which have been raised by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) and so that an agreement