

That is why I strongly believe that total co-operation is required in this House. If we are unable to reach an agreement on the question we will be setting a terrible example for our fellow citizens. As members of Parliament, we must show Canadians that we are able to deal with this matter expeditiously and professionally. I say expeditiously because Canadians are fed up with this bickering over the Constitution and want the matter resolved as soon as possible so that we can all get on with our lives.

Unfortunately we are off to a bad start. The opposition parties have not been consulted at all on this bill. Our House leader was only briefed. If this government was genuinely concerned about our Constitution and the future of this country, it would have put Canadians and Canada's interests first and politics last. Our country should be first and foremost in our hearts and in our minds because the issue at hand transcends partisanship; it goes far beyond political expediency. The unity of our country is at stake.

The bill does not provide for a double majority. A fair referendum should not only have a majority of votes at the end of tabulation, but it should also have a majority in the five regions of the country. I believe there should be a majority in Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Canada, western Canada, and northern Canada. This would better serve the concept of a fair and realistic referendum as no one or two regions of Canada would impose its will on another region.

We have to come out of this constitutional exercise better off than when we entered into it. Therefore, we must have a national majority and a regional majority. Furthermore, once the referendum results are in all premiers should acknowledge the results and comply with the will of their people.

Once again this referendum must be understood by all and to be fair at all stages of the process. It must be unquestionably fair. The days of major decision making behind closed doors without a mandate are over. The people will no longer accept this. I believe Canadians are tired of hearing about the Constitution and would rather talk about the economy as it is extremely important. We must all realize that this matter has to be resolved once and for all.

Government Orders

We are going through very difficult economic times. The risks are high but we cannot allow this wonderful country of ours to perish because of the negative vote. In my view it would be disastrous.

The final decision will be rendered by the people and not by governments or politicians. We will get our marching orders directly from the people and the decision should be very clear and should give government clear direction also.

• (1150)

To conclude I would like to say once again that the Liberal Party fully supports and endorses the concept of a referendum on constitutional proposals. The Canadian people must be given the opportunity to express their views. After all, this country belongs to them.

However, as I have previously indicated, we require some changes to this bill. The government must allow amendments to be adopted. Without these amendments I am very concerned about the outcome of the referendum and I hope that the governing party will see the light and take down these political barriers.

There have to be firm limits on spending to allow this to be a fair choice for the country. The limits would create an atmosphere which would be more likely to result in a fair decision. This bill should allow for a national and regional majority.

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley—Hants): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to participate, even for this short period of time, in the debate on Bill C-81. I must say, as other speakers have said, that in a referendum bill that is supposed to pull the country together and be a unifying force we certainly got off to a very bad start to have the government invoke time allocation this morning after just two and half days of debate on what for me is a most important bill and the question that will come from this bill, this Parliament is going to have to decide.

Those were two and a half short days and it does not auger well for the mood of the country and/or any debate on what finally is going to be in a constitutional package, let alone a referendum question when we get to that. I could speak for the whole 10 minutes on the ramrod, jack-boot method of the government House leader in forcing this bill through when we do not even know what the constitutional package is and there are no deadlines