

no longer have their rights safeguarded by the Charter of Rights.

The Liberal party has said many times that all senators in Canada and in all provinces and territories must be elected. All people under the law of the land must be equal. Honourable senators, the people in Quebec must have the right to vote.

Unfortunately, honourable senators, the present government has once again tried to make an unholy alliance between the Quebec separatists and the western libertarians, thus forcing the country to the brink so that Liberals who love this country will have no choice but to go along for the ride.

• (2110)

Today I sit in this chamber as an ordinary Canadian citizen, fluent in three languages. In future, I will be required to select one of my languages so that the Speaker can decide if I have two votes or one on matters relating to culture and language. Furthermore, it is the same Speaker who will decide what legislation relates to language and culture.

May I, with great anguish, remind honourable senators of the incident where the Senate Speaker called the vote and locked the doors before Liberals were able to gain entrance. It would seem to me, therefore, more prudent to curtail the powers of the Speaker, especially in matters of language and culture, as we do not know who will be named Speaker under a partially-appointed, partially-elected regime for the Senate.

I know what it means to be asked to vote in a referendum. As a Quebecer, I lived with the referendum in 1980, which was a far more divisive debate. As part of the federalist forces I truly believed that we were near the brink. I believed that a "yes" vote on the referendum would herald the end of my country. With hindsight, it would not have happened. A "yes" vote in that referendum would not have been the end of Canada. It would have been the beginning of long negotiations; negotiations which quite likely would have resulted in an agreement similar to the one reached in Charlottetown. At the worst it would have been a practice run for a second referendum to be held on sovereignty.

Honourable senators, if we were not then at the brink then we are not at the brink now. A "no" vote is simply a vote against the deal. I have just given you several strong reasons as to why a "no" vote might be the preferred option. A "no" vote will not be the end of Quebec. Canadians, including my fellow Quebecers, see this government for what it is. They will not view this government's failure to create a strong agreement or to achieve a victory in the referendum as an indication that an agreement is not possible. I believe Canadians do not have high expectations of this government and will not be surprised by its failure.

Even if Canadians and Quebecers did have high expectations of this government, a "no" vote will simply mean a second referendum in Quebec—this time to be held on sovereignty, a question many federalists and separatists feel should be asked right now.

Hon. Eymard G. Corbin: Excuse me, honourable senators, there is so much conversation going on in this house I can barely hear my colleague, who is just three seats away from me. Could we ask the Speaker to re-establish order, please?

Senator Wood: That brings me to the motion before us today which is on the question. We are not being asked to approve the final agreement. In fact, Canadians will not even be permitted to do that. We are being asked to approve the question which will be put before Canadians. The proposed question reads as follows:

Do you agree that the Constitution of Canada should be renewed on the basis of the agreement reached on August 28, 1992? Yes or no?

Honourable senators why did the government pick the word "renewed" as opposed to "amended"? In a recent letter to the editor, Sydney Hicks, the cousin of a former colleague of ours, the late Senator Hicks, wrote:

I do not believe the Prime Minister chose the word "renewed" simply to put a spin on the referendum question, I believe he chose it to weaken the question. The word "amended" is a strong word.

I agree with Sydney Hicks and I believe the clause concerning culture is evidence of this. The culture clause has, admittedly, been renegotiated since Charlottetown. If the question said "amended" and Canadians voted to "agree that the Constitution of Canada be amended on the basis of the agreement reached on August 28, 1992", then this revamped clause would not be allowed. The premiers and the Prime Minister could not continue to make changes to the agreement on whim. They would be honour bound to respect the text of their agreement and the wishes of the Canadian electorate. All that would be left to do would be for the Department of Justice to draft legal text which reflected the agreement, in the same way that the Department of Justice must respect a decision of Cabinet when preparing legal text for Parliament.

I am concerned about the agreement as it now stands. I am concerned about how much of this agreement will be renegotiated over the weeks and months ahead, and I am concerned about the ambiguity of the question. Because of that, I feel I must abstain pending some clarifications. I will then bide my time until the next general election so that we may see a new government in Ottawa lead by the Liberal Party—a Liberal Party which is committed to strengthening the half-elected, half-effective Senate through standing orders and parliamentary legislation; a Liberal Party that would have brought Canada proper constitutional change so that it can prosper into the twenty-first century; a Liberal Party that would have brought Canadians a fair referendum question.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, when my honourable friend says that she will abstain, does that mean that she will abstain from voting on this question, or does she intend to abstain on October 26?

Senator Wood: Could you repeat the question?