

*The Constitution*

the people of Canada? No. This extraordinary measure to limit the ability of Parliament to speak, this measure of closure, is being used on the debate of the constitution of Canada itself. That is an absolute abuse of the power of a majority in this House of Commons.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Clark:** I say this deliberately, if there were more members with the kind of courage their electors thought they had when they sent them to the House of Commons, this motion would not have passed and we would not be operating under the rules of closure here today.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Clark:** I must also say, Mr. Speaker, that unfortunately in this debate so far—in the 24 hours plus of debate that we have had on this question—the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has demonstrated his respect for Parliament and his interest, his interest, in the constitutional question. He urged members of Parliament from all parties to debate, and then he took away their opportunity to debate by slapping a muzzle on the mouths of the elected representatives of the House of Commons and then he, himself, declined to come before the House. Why was that? I suspect it was because he is ashamed of the measure which he is bringing in here, as every other member of his party should be ashamed. What they are trying to do in the name of reforming the Constitution of Canada is to force upon the people of Canada, by going to Britain, proposals which they are not confident the people of Canada themselves would accept if they went to the people.

**An hon. Member:** That is not correct.

**Mr. Clark:** Some otherwise silent Liberal backbencher who has voted here for closure, voted to muzzle Parliament, says that is not true. If it is not true, why is the Government of Canada running to Britain with questions which should be decided here in the Canadian House of Commons? Why do you not trust the people of Canada? Why do you hide out in Westminster?

Let me refer also to the attitude of the NDP, as my colleague earlier did, toward the question of closure. The Leader of the NDP (Mr. Broadbent) yesterday, after closure was announced by the government House leader, had an opportunity to stand in his place and speak. He mentioned the word "closure" once. He mentioned it in passing. The word passed his lips. But there was no objection by the NDP to closure. There was no objection taken on the floor of the House of Commons to the muzzling of Parliament on a matter of fundamental concern and fundamental interest to the people of this country—for the third time in the history of Canada. We do not know what the price was. We do not know what went on in those discussions between the Leader of the NDP, that Neville Chamberlain of Canadian politics, and the Prime Minister of Canada. Clearly, whatever it was, it bought the silence of the NDP and they did not even stand in their places yesterday to oppose the imposition of closure, to oppose the

attempt by the Government of Canada to muzzle debate on the fundamental law of the land in this country.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Clark:** Mr. Speaker, by their actions in the last 24 hours the government have demonstrated what some of us previously had only feared—that there is no willingness at all on the part of the Prime Minister, his ministers or, apparently, his supporters on both sides of this House of Commons, to engage in meaningful parliamentary debate on the constitutional resolution. The Prime Minister, after stating last October 2 that Parliament would return early to begin debate on this matter, after demanding that all the members of the House participate, said "Every member of Parliament from every corner of this land is asked to participate in this historic act." Now, after only 24 hours of debate involving less than one-fifth of the members of this chamber, we are faced with closure.

This is an extraordinary situation that the Liberal party has imposed upon the House of Commons today, a deep abuse of this institution. Such a move, such a gagging of the members of this institution, should not be undertaken lightly. Indeed, we know that the advice of even the most cynical of the Prime Minister's advisers indicated that, in the words of the famous leaked memorandum, that has guided their every action since Herb Gray broke his word about resigning if interest rates went up—that famous leaked memorandum said:

It would be almost unthinkable to use time allocation (closure) on a resolution calling for patriation of the constitution.

That is what the leaked memorandum said—"almost unthinkable". Yet the unthinkable has happened. Further, by his stubborn adherence to a December 9 deadline for committee consideration, the government of the Prime Minister is determined to use every parliamentary device, every cynical means of manipulation to thwart parliamentary public debate.

I hope that the government will accept the amendment that is put forward here so that there will be an opportunity for this Parliament to consider this matter without having a gun to its head, so that there will be an opportunity for the members of the House of Commons to take this question across the country.

The other day we asked the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) whether there would be an opportunity to travel. We asked the Prime Minister this question again today. In declining to answer, they both indicated that they wanted to keep the committee here. Well, why should the constitution of Canada be confined to a discussion in the city of Ottawa? I see the hon. member for Niagara Falls (Mr. MacBain) is here. Why should not the people of Niagara Falls have an opportunity to express their concerns about the constitution of their country in their city? Why, if they are worried about it, should they have to come here?

I see members of Parliament here from Toronto. Why should Liberal members of Parliament from Toronto put up with a provision which says that a committee considering the Constitution of Canada will hold its deliberations only here? Indeed, there is a chairman of a committee from Toronto here.