

That is the question before us. If the debate on the referendum shows that the proposals are unfair to the West, or any other region, there is not a Western senator in this house on either side who would support it. If it is considered fair and the debate and the text and the arguments are fair, I would think that we would all support it.

In any event, it will not be up to us. It will be up to the people who vote on the referendum.

This is only the third time in our history that we have had a referendum. The first was in 1988 on prohibition. The second was in 1942 on conscription. Both of those earlier issues divided the country, and, clearly, when the powers that be decided to have this present referendum they realized that this could be an issue that divided us rather than uniting us, but that is for the future and that will be for the people to decide after the debate takes place.

I suggest that we move now, Mr. Speaker, to deal with this motion before us which deals in very essential words, in English and French, with the question on the wording of the referendum itself.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre De Bané: Honourable senators, the purpose of this debate is to consider the advisability of consulting the people on amending the Canadian Constitution. Personally, I have always thought that any amendment to the Constitution must be approved by the people because usually the changes are irreversible and a new government and the ones that come after cannot as a rule modify it later. They are irreversible changes and that is why I am very much in favour of having the people approve the basic law of the land. That is what many other countries do, like France, Switzerland, Australia and so many more. Changes to the fundamental law must be approved by those who hold the ultimate sovereignty, that is, the people in a democracy.

Nevertheless, I feel a certain unease. Of course, this is not due to the desire to consult the people, no. I feel uneasy because for years I have heard something quite disturbing in my country. I heard it recently when I was a member of the commission originally chaired by Mrs. Dobbie, an MP, and co-chaired by Senator Castonguay and later by Senator Beaudoin. Basically, what people in every region told us is that they do not get enough from the central government and they want more. "What more will Canada do for my province?" That essentially is what I heard. I was on it with Senator Barootes, who is indicating to me that he agrees with my analysis. We saw these increasingly strident displays of selfishness in our meetings. In every region and every province, people asked us, "What more will I get out of this whole exercise?"

Today I read in *La Presse* this big article by my friend and learned colleague, Senator Beaudoin. He detailed the devolution of powers from the central government to the provinces and especially to his province and mine, Quebec, and he expressed it in terms of gains for Quebec. That is how every provincial premier is selling this constitutional change to his

constituents: "Here are the 'gains' I made in Ottawa, here are the things I grabbed from the central government." I say that if that is the spirit, we are all dreaming if we think that national unity will be stronger the day after these constitutional changes are ratified. I think that what has been happening in the past week should open our eyes. For example, I see the premier of my province saying that he forgot some things that he wanted to get in Charlottetown. Today he wants to make sure that the central government promises to devolve these powers to him.

I am thinking of the premier of a province, not my province of Quebec but another province, who said not so long ago: "Let us arrange our affairs so that the destiny of our province will never be subject to the federal Parliament." I say that is not the way to strengthen national unity. Honourable senators, I have always thought that if this country breaks up one day, history will record that it broke up because the citizens of this country were not worthy of it. That is the basic issue. Each and every one of us must not only make demands on the central government; we must also say what we are prepared to do to deserve this country.

[English]

We have to decide, once and for all, not only what we want to extract from Ottawa, but what each of us can give to our country to earn the right to be called a Canadian. This is what we have to do, and I have not heard very much about that.

[Translation]

I think it is time we realized what kind of country we are living in. This country recently ranked first in the world for its quality of life. This means that all of the countries, including Switzerland, France, Great Britain, Sweden, Japan, Germany and the United States, ranked lower than Canada. Canada is number one, Canada, which is already the most decentralized federation in the world.

I have yet to hear a single leader, especially at the provincial level, say what they are prepared to do to deserve this country, to live in this country. Doesn't the fact that we are signing free trade agreements with the outside world, with foreign countries, and that we can't manage that in our own country, say enough about the selfish attitudes in this country because, in the end, federalism means merging our collective solidarities.

If we are not prepared to do that, if the only kind of constitutional change we want is the kind that will make the central government powerless so that in the end, the two most populated provinces will be governing this country, I say that is no way to deserve this country of ours.

[English]

Senator Murray: Honourable senators —

The Hon. the Acting Speaker: May I remind honourable senators that, if Senator Murray speaks now, his speech will have the effect of closing the debate.