

The Constitution

date is in no way limited to economic and energy matters. We also have a mandate to act in the area of the constitution, on behalf of the people of this country, Mr. Speaker. Our action is perfectly justified and perfectly legal. To show respect for the people you represent, you should at least have the decency to let them know in their own language what you are doing and why, and in all humility I submit this is what I have been trying to do in this speech.

I am sorry if I took a little too long; I do not usually make full use of my 40-minute speaking time but I had to do it at a certain point in this debate, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to take part once again in this debate on the constitution to give this overview because I am deeply convinced that our approach is sober, balanced, realistic and timely, and that it is respectful of the rights of all Canadians. Mr. Speaker, the Canadian people that we are representing in this House is a generous, dignified and free people. This is why we are acting the way we are.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard) has referred to Mr. Lévesque's problem with regard to the Constitution of Canada. I can understand Mr. Lévesque's objection: he is a separatist. But there is also a problem with Mr. Ryan. Mr. Ryan has voiced his own objections against this proposal. Why is he against it? Is the Government of Canada on speaking terms with Mr. Ryan? Why has the position held by the Government of Canada met with Mr. Ryan's disapproval?

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, I shall answer that question. Mr. Ryan has said, and that is important, that he agrees fully with the substance of the proposal, or the meat of it. A bill of rights entrenched in the constitution, he agrees with that; essentially, he agrees with patriation; and Mr. Ryan is in favour of reducing regional disparities. Yes, I have read all that. I know what Mr. Ryan has said. He fully agrees with our basic decision to act, and I respect his opinion. He does not agree with the timing. I feel we should patriate the constitution after agreements have been reached. But we have been saying that for 53 years now. I am glad that Mr. Ryan is on our side as far as the substance is concerned. As to the form this should take, we may have differing views, but I still respect his opinion. I am happy about one thing though and that is the two years for the amending formula, and my colleague will have to agree with me that the heart of this process, of this proposed reform, is the amending formula. I am convinced that within a few months, with Mr. Ryan in Quebec, we will be able to negotiate a final amending formula. This will not be done with Mr. Lévesque. Mr. Ryan will have a say in the matter. Within the two years of unanimity provided by the bill, Mr. Ryan will manage to get elected and will be negotiating with us, along with the other premiers, in search of the right amending formula. If my colleague is afraid that Mr. Ryan will not take part in the constitutional debate, in the establishment of an amending formula, I am more certain and less skeptical than

he is. I have more confidence in Mr. Ryan's chances of winning the next provincial election.

● (1740)

[English]

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, I make an appeal to the House. There were certain understandings about the division of time this afternoon under which the hon. member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie) would have been able to make his speech before we rise. That time schedule has gone awry somewhat. I wonder if the House would be courteous enough to let the hon. member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill finish his speech this afternoon, even if it takes us to five or ten minutes after six.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Is that agreed to by all members?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Irwin: Mr. Speaker, a section of the constitution was misquoted by the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie). The point is important enough that it should be clarified, and I rise on a point of order on the matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. What the hon. member is raising does not constitute a point of order. If he wishes to correct a statement made by the previous speaker, it can be done perhaps through other channels, but certainly not by way of a point of order.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, may I begin this afternoon by saying how grateful I am to Providence for finding myself an active participant in a debate which is, no doubt, part of a constitutional watershed in Canadian history. For better or for worse the Canadian Parliament is being asked to act unilaterally on several fronts in order to break what is perceived to be a constitutional stalemate of long standing.

Today I will try to reflect on what we are being asked to do as a Parliament, and I use the word "reflect" deliberately. This is not an election campaign. It is a debate about the very nature and future of our country, and I encourage all hon. members to see it in that light. I particularly encourage government members to see the debate in this light because I have noticed over the past few days since we began the debate on the constitution a certain partisanship and an arrogant lack of respect for views critical of the government's proposals. I think this is to be deplored in debates of such national significance.

Whether we be New Democrats, Conservatives or Liberals, we must all assume that the others come here with a respectable modicum of love for this country, however various the ideologies and interpretations of tradition we bring to the articulation of this love for Canada. This variety about which I am speaking is Canadian and, therefore, this variety is worthy of being listened to, if we wish to have a real debate and not our usual shouting match.