

comes to it we will just go along. We will not forget we said that and that we are committed to that.

The New Democratic Party has not forgotten it was committed to saying that the west has to have a voice, Quebec has to have a voice, Ontario has to have a voice, the maritimes and Newfoundland and Labrador must have a voice, and the north must have a voice. It has not forgotten that. When our party makes those commitments in reports that it signs, it means them.

Obviously, it seems more expedient to put that aside, for the government to say no. It wants Canadians to have a voice, but it is not going to tell them how it is going to listen to that voice. Yes, Canadians can put their marks on the ballots and their views might be taken or they might not. The government will decide at the time. That is not good enough. It is not good enough for Canadians to become involved in their country, to mark their ballots for their country, and then to be ignored.

[*Translation*]

There are indeed many problems with this bill. I repeat once again that today's debate is not on the principle of a referendum but rather on the appropriate rules governing such an exercise.

I have already mentioned the two reports that we supported, just like the Conservatives and the Liberals did, and which recommended not only that all of Canada should give its approval, but also that each region should support the same constitutional objectives.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Those represent our major concerns about this bill. Some may suggest, indeed some have here today, that we have raised some of the worst case scenarios. Surely, it is our role as parliamentarians to analyse carefully what is being done here. I make no apology for that because legislation should foresee all possible scenarios.

We know that the result of any referendum could be called into question by those the Prime Minister has called the enemies of Canada. That is precisely why we have to build in fairness and legitimacy to the process, so that the process itself will not be called into question and so that these enemies, these people who want to destroy Canada, do not have that tool in their arsenal. It is fundamental that the process is seen as legitimate from the beginning.

Government Orders

A campaign bought by the rich with a meaningless question could be simply divisive. Those who want to destroy Canada would use it against Canada.

There are those in this House who say that we have to accept this inadequate bill, that we should not have a democratic debate because we should all just go along and that is the better thing to do and the nicer thing to do. I dare say there will not be one person in this House who votes yes on this bill who does not believe it is an inadequate bill. I have to say that, yes, the easy thing to do is to simply go along.

I have listened to the insults and the charges by the Leader of the Opposition and the government leader. I make no apologies that I take my responsibility as a parliamentarian seriously to raise serious questions in this House.

Yes, it is more comfortable in the short term to accept something knowing it is inadequate. Let us remember this is not as it was originally proposed, legislation that would be in place for three years, but now is permanent legislation. Therefore, those who are going to vote yes on this inadequate legislation should think they are voting now for permanent legislation.

As I said earlier, we are not debating whether there should be a referendum. If there is a referendum the New Democratic Party will participate in it. But the essence of parliamentary debate and what we are sent here to do is to raise questions when we feel they are serious, not to oppose for the sake of opposing, but to stand up for fairness and to ensure that all Canadians have a voice.

We will never back down from doing that and we will never back down from debate because of fear. We will debate on substance and merit. We will stand up in this House on every occasion, yes, even on the occasion of the Constitution and debate from the principles we believe, based on the substance and merit of whatever is being debated. We will not be intimidated by those who say: "Well, I will get you in the next election". I care more about this country than I do about the next election. It is our job as parliamentarians to raise questions and to debate.

I regret that we will not be able to support this bill at third reading. I urge the government to make sure it will reconsider and offer Canadians a fair voice.