

Adjournment Debate

My question to the government was merely that it affirm that it is the position of the Government of Canada that the constitutional status of a province could only be changed legally and would be done through this amending formula. This would of course not apply simply with a separation scenario but to any constitutional change. I would maintain that it is the duty of the federal government which purports that national unity is its highest priority to recognize that it does have an obligation to uphold the Constitution.

I would also note that politically there would be considerable advantage for it to make clear to the people of Quebec that when they are being told that separation can be achieved unilaterally that this is legally untrue. In fact, it would also be political untrue, politically unfeasible to pursue in that manner.

We would also of course be interested to know what the position would be of the leader of the official opposition on such an illegal position as unilateral separation. However I do not expect the parliamentary secretary to comment on that particular question.

My second question concerned an article recently written in *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Autumn 1994, by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra. He held that today the federal government retains full constitutional options to allow or not to allow a referendum vote, to control the content and wording of any referendum question, to control the actual timing of any vote, and to launch its own pre-emptive nationwide referendum legally superseding any Quebec vote.

As you well know, the opinions of the member for Vancouver Quadra are of some interest not simply because he wrote the article but because he is a noted constitutional expert and also a member of the governing caucus. While I do not subscribe necessarily to all his constitutional views I would certainly think that the government would take note of them and would be prepared to comment on whether it believes these are in fact the constitutional powers of the federal government.

I would note that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs himself has previously commented that the federal government should consider the option of a national referendum. I believe this is an option our own party would suggest should be considered, not necessarily acted upon but certainly considered given that ultimately the unity of the country and its future constitutional status is the business of all Canadians.

I put that question and hope to receive more enlightenment than I did on Monday.

Mr. John English (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. It is quite an extended question and is obviously a subject of considerable debate.

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs for whom I am answering believes that the Constitution Acts do not provide any rules or procedures for secession of one of the provinces.

The argument which has been presented by the hon. member for Calgary West that the amending formula can be stretched to include the secession of a province is a point of view. However as the hon. member suggests there are many points of view on constitutional questions. Colleagues of mine have expressed constitutional views. Members of the opposition have as well.

It is very clear that when the time comes there is international precedent and there is domestic precedent in this regard. However, what I think the record shows internationally is that in cases of secession what is likely to occur is so much confusion and trouble that it would be impossible to proceed in an orderly and fashionable manner and indicate what goes before.

It seems to us that the premise of the member's question is that we should say: You cannot leave unless we let you go. That does not seem to be a very helpful approach at this time. Our approach is to argue to Quebecers that the case for secession cannot be sustained. It involves costs and risks that are unnecessary and that this country is too precious to be destroyed.

We want the question to be put fairly and quickly. We agree with the leader of the Reform Party who has expressed that point of view. I do not intend to talk on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, but I believe he said this morning in Toronto that he is a democrat and we are all democrats. Certainly we in this Chamber are all democrats and a democratic decision is appropriate and will occur we hope promptly and with a clear question.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 38(5), a motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7.32 p.m.)