

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

REFERENDUM ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

The House resumed from Wednesday, May 20, consideration of the motion of Mr. Andre that Bill C-81, an act to provide for referendums on the Constitution of Canada, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee in the Departmental envelope; and the amendment of Mr. Murphy (p. 10955).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The hon. member for Cardigan has eight minutes remaining in his speech.

Mr. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan): Mr. Speaker, once again I rise to speak on Bill C-81, the referendum legislation. Yesterday evening I indicated how pleased the people of Cardigan, Prince Edward Island, and I were that this legislation was finally brought forward.

It is unfortunate the legislation was not brought forward sooner so that the government would not have had to bring in allocation time or closure. With this we do not permit all members to indicate how they feel about the legislation. This is not acceptable to the people of Canada, but being they have the majority they can do what the like for now.

Now that we have the bill in front of us we must take a look at it and see what the government's proposition is. From what I can see there are several problems with the legislation and with the question as to whether the government really intends to have a national vote.

The bill allows the government to call a vote in one or more provinces. The government has said this to avoid the confusion of having two constitutional votes in the same province. However, having some Canadians vote on different questions at different times could be a disaster.

The point of a vote is for Canadians to reach a conclusion on a single issue. It would be like Alberta voting yes or no whether to buy a Ford car, P.E.I. voting yes or no if it should buy a Chrysler, and Quebec voting yes or no if it should buy a car from General Motors.

Instead all Canadians should get together and vote whether or not we want a car at all, whether or not we want the Constitution or we want this country to remain together or not.

Separate votes on separate questions would only serve to confuse Canadians about the results. To avoid the confusion, all Canadians should vote on the same day, on the same question. To do anything else would leave this important question unresolved.

The bill would also allow the government to worm its way out of a national vote altogether. The referendum legislation itself is not binding, let alone the results. Clause 3 of the bill indicates that the Governor in Council may call for a referendum. I feel the government should be required to hold a vote on the Constitution, not only this time but any time the Constitution is to be amended in the future. As it stands now the government has put a sunset clause in the bill, killing it three years after it has passed. That would allow this or any future government to make amendments to the Constitution without first consulting Canadians.

• (1100)

The government has said no to spending limits in the legislation. Anybody, any corporation or any lobby group, can spend however much they want. This is unfair because during the last federal election Canadians saw the result of unrestricted third party advertising and spending. Is it fair for Canadians if certain well funded, special interest groups are allowed to hijack the national agenda? Spending limits must be included to ensure the fairness of the whole process.

For spending limits to be truly effective people must be organized into logical groups. The Liberal Party has called on the government to organize participants under two umbrella groups. Such umbrella groups would not only ease the imposition of spending limits, they would require Canadians to work together in a spirit of compromise and co-operation.

While nobody expects the constitutional deal to be perfect, there should be something in it for everybody to support. Umbrella groups would force Canadians to come forward to reveal their true colours. By having umbrella groups Canadians will have to decide if they are in favour of national unity or if they are against it.