

*Private Members' Business*

Constitution of this country, to prepare proposals and to present them in order to ensure the renewal of our Constitution. However, I have one major reservation.

We are now engaged in an attempt to bring about a thorough reform of our Constitution. This massive national effort concerns, first of all, the citizens of this country, especially where the reform of our institutions is concerned, and I am thinking more specifically of the House of Commons.

The hon. member proposes to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 with respect to the House of Commons. Since all citizens who wish to do so are taking part in the current debate on the federal constitutional proposals, I think Canadians should be asked for their opinion in this instance as well. We must not deprive the citizens of this country of their right to take part in parliamentary reform. The bill under consideration is not an ordinary amendment: it affects the Constitution, the basis of our parliamentary democracy. Although the proposed amendment is short, it is very significant. Therefore it should be considered carefully.

I believe that members of all parties are perfectly aware that reforming Parliament, and especially the House of Commons, is too important to be left to members of this House alone, Mr. Speaker. Some people claim that the reputation of Parliament has suffered and that reform is necessary. Whether this criticism is justified or not, I think it is extremely important to react appropriately to the general interest shown across the country for parliamentary reform. We should therefore co-operate fully with the people and institutions in seeking ways to improve Parliament. It is most important as well to show that we are prepared to co-operate.

At the very moment when the whole country is trying to find a consensus on the reform of our main institutions, we in the House of Commons have taken it upon ourselves to make changes without widely consulting Canadians.

Some will say that Canadians are not interested in the reform of their Constitution, their institutions and their Parliament. Some will also claim that Canadians have clearly shown that they are primarily concerned with the economy, unemployment and their own security.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think that is an accurate assessment of Canadians' state of mind. Of course our

fellow citizens are interested in the economy and employment and their material security, as we all are. But Canadians, well informed as they are, realize full well that prosperity and unity are inseparable and that Parliament is in the best position to defend national unity. It is a forum where we can and must debate the issue and then agree to act so as to ensure a prosperous future for our country.

The amendment before us proposes to include in the oath of allegiance found in the Constitution the duties of citizens and members of Parliament. Obviously, the hon. member for Hamilton West considered his bill for a long time.

We must thoroughly amend our Constitution and in 1992, all Canadians must have a chance to take part in the process. And, despite what some of the media would have us believe, many citizens are ready to suggest quite specific parliamentary reforms that they think are not only applicable and relevant but also an important contribution to the process.

Many people proclaim that in its present form, the House of Commons is no longer the representative, democratic and equitable legislative body that 21st century Canadians need. Mr. Speaker, I think that we must avoid taking amendments out of context; instead, we should do so as part of the over-all process of constitutional renewal.

Mr. Speaker, we have already begun this process of renewal.

• (1200)

I would hope that the hon. member for Hamilton West will see that it is really in his interest to make his proposal part of the over-all constitutional reform process. That is how we must act and that is the procedure which I propose to follow.

[*English*]

**Mr. Murray Cardiff (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak very briefly on Bill C-270.

I have to say that Bill C-270 goes right to the heart of a matter which concerns every member of this House. It is an amendment to the Constitution, one which proposes reform of one of our parliamentary traditions. I believe that every member who knows, loves, and respects this