

Government Orders

and if people will spontaneously break into two groups only. And, whether the law says so or not, common sense will prevail". Of course, we will be able to tell whether it is normal and natural to have only two umbrellas and whether people will spontaneously get under one or the other.

I repeat, those who oppose this legislation do so without knowing how it will be applied and it is too early to tell.

Third I say to those who think that the government will take advantage of its position that they are speculating on the circumstances surrounding a future referendum.

Evidently, we in the Liberal Party will ensure that Canadians may express their opinion on the constitutional reform, and particularly that Canadians have the opportunity to say yes to Quebec and Quebecers to say yes to Canada.

We think that when the government establishes that most democratic process to consult the people on constitutional reform, it will be possible to obtain with them a reform which will take into account the legitimate demands of Quebec, of the aboriginal peoples and of the citizens of the less populated provinces of Canada, provided that the constitutional proposal meets the objectives which were expressed so very clearly and precisely by the leader of the Liberal Party. If that constitutional proposal is submitted to the people, we have no hesitation, we are sure we will come alongside of the government.

If I understood the statements of the NPD leader properly, I think they also will join with the government and with us to fight in favour of Canada. I say to those who are here under false pretence—except for the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie—that in the province of Quebec, people will vote in favour of a renewed Canadian federalism which would satisfy Quebec's objectives.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Ouellet: Finally, a lot has been said about the fact that this bill is flawed—

An hon. member: Totally.

Mr. Ouellet: —because it does not provide a clause to interpret the referendum results.

Earlier today in the debate, our leader expressed the hope that no constitutional change would be made

without the approval of a majority of citizens from the four major regions of the country. Of course, we think that it would be more appropriate to insert that clause in the legislation itself.

I raised that matter earlier with the minister, who assured me that the referendum bill has no legal effect per se to amend the Constitution. So, it is obvious that, even if this consultation of the people has no legal value or is not binding, it will necessarily have a huge moral and symbolic value.

We think that when the Prime Minister decides to put to the people of Canada a constitutional proposal, since it is not in this bill, it will be extremely important that he announces, even before the referendum, that his government undertakes not to proceed with a series of constitutional amendments unless they have been approved by a majority of Canadians in each of the major regions of the country.

To us, of the Liberal Party of Canada, it is obvious that, in the future, we will let such a commitment be our guide.

One thing is certain. When we return to power, this referendum legislation will be amended. The bill provides for its revision by a parliamentary committee in four years. By that time, I hope, the Liberals will be back in power and in a position, with their majority, to amend this legislation. We shall ensure that, in future, constitutional amendments will have to be submitted to Canadians for approval and will require the approval of not only an over-all majority of Canadians but of a majority of Canadians in the Atlantic provinces, in Quebec, in Ontario and in Western provinces.

I see that my time has just about run out, but I would like to raise another point before concluding. I would like to stress that a parliamentary committee gave this bill very serious consideration.

An hon. member: Over two days.

Mr. Ouellet: Some Bloc Quebecois members made a lot of noise for the media over the manner in which this bill was considered at report stage. I would point out that few of them made an appearance while the parliamentary committee was examining this bill and they stayed only for a few minutes. They completely underestimated the very serious work that was done at that stage. I would remind them that a large number of amendments were presented.