

Government Orders

Mr. Speaker, should Canada's future be put in the hands of the non-elected? I wonder why the Prime Minister didn't ask the senators to be in charge of this committee. That would be just as democratic as what he announced this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I think the speeches by the various party leaders were the kind of speech they would have made in 1980. Ten years later, it is too late to decide to listen and respond to the question "what does Quebec want?". It is even worse this time, Mr. Speaker. The Quebec Round has been deep-sixed, and Quebec's legitimate demands, which are a prerequisite for any negotiations, will now be swallowed up by the demands of all Canadians.

The Prime Minister's failure to achieve national reconciliation has now been transmogrified into a kind of mini-committee which, as I see it, Mr. Speaker, will show Quebecers the utter lack of understanding that exists vis-à-vis Quebec.

Mr. Speaker, I have the distinct impression that if all the hearings are televised, they will prove to be Quebec sovereignty's best ally. I am convinced that night after night in the months to come, television will show Quebecers intolerance, lack of understanding and a refusal to accommodate our distinct identity.

And this is unfortunate.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, who is very sensitive to Quebec issues and who will rise later on, must realize that what we will get before this committee is a demonstration of ill-will. Actually, we should be relieved at the federal government's lack of imagination.

What I want to say, to the Prime Minister and to this House, is that we are not impressed at all by this diversion, and that the real purpose of this committee is not nation building but to provide a media event for the Prime Minister's weekend convention. We are only too aware that this is all part of a plan to shut up the Quebec Conservative Party and give them something to chew on during the weekend.

Mr. Speaker, I think this House is very disappointed in the government's lack of initiative. On the other hand, we see this committee as an opportunity for English Canada to do some soul-searching. That is good news. But in any case, it's too late, so use this committee to decide how you intend to negotiate with a sovereign Quebec.

If the committee really wants to fulfil its mandate and listen to the concerns of Canadians, it must be prepared for the choice Quebecers will make, irrespective of its findings.

Mr. Speaker, these comments were made subsequent to what was said by the Leader of the NDP, and I thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I did not make a speech for 1980. I think we must look to the future.

• (1640)

Neither I nor my party are separatists. We intend to work together with all Canadians for the future of this country, a united country that is a reflection of our cultural diversity. I am proud of the fact that, for 25 years, my party has supported the concept of Quebec as a distinct society, and we will continue to support that concept, as well as the rights of natives, women, and the other provinces and territories, so that they will all have a place in Canada.

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel): Mr. Speaker, I think it is clear that what the Prime Minister said in this House at a very important moment in our history was well received, both by the Official Opposition and the Leader of the New Democratic Party. I deeply regret that among all these efforts to restore Canadian unity, efforts that may be a bit late in some cases but that are nevertheless being made by the Prime Minister at this time, the only strident note was struck by a member who seeks what he calls Quebec's sovereignty. I believe it is still possible to say that Canada, the Canadian federal system, provides the best guarantee for the survival of Francophones living in the province of Quebec, and that the federal structure is still the best system of government for the legitimate aspirations of Quebecers.

If some members in the Parliament of this country appear to have lost confidence in Canada, I find that regrettable. I think they are doing a disservice to the people of Quebec by taking a defeatist and pessimistic stance with respect to Canadian institutions that have admirably safeguarded the survival of French and French culture over the years.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.