

*Government Orders*

the Constitution cannot be changed without the consent of the province of Quebec, as was the case in the past.

I totally agree that the cornerstone of a country is its constitution. I also agree with the member for Kootenay East when he says that the Constitution is the property of the people who live in a country. However, the fact that Quebec has gone without signing the Constitution since 1982 has not prevented us Quebecers from developing and flourishing along with other parts of Canada.

I would also like to point out that Great Britain does not even have a constitution.

[English]

Think of the great powers and influence Great Britain has had over centuries. The fact that it does not have a Constitution has not prevented that country from developing. Quebec and Canada have evolved together and we can continue to evolve together.

The member for Portneuf said that the veto is a watering down, but that is false. The veto protects Quebec right now. If his leader, the current Leader of the Opposition and future premier of Quebec, would agree to enshrining it in the Constitution we would be the first to embark on that process. However, his own chef de l'opposition has already gone on record saying that he does not want constitutional change. We all know what the Bloc Quebecois want. It will settle for nothing short of a separate Quebec.

I defy the current Leader of the Opposition. When he occupies his new position in Quebec City as the premier of that province he should remember the words he spoke today in the House. He espoused that Canada is one of the most democratic countries in the world. He above all should know that in the position he occupies.

Therefore, when I hear the Bloc Quebecois members speak of democracy and criticize the government for not respecting democracy I find it a bit strange. Their version of democracy is—

[Translation]

If the vote is yes, they accept it as a yes. If it is no, they will accept it democratically, but the very night of the no victory, the Leader of the Opposition was threatening us with yet another referendum. A funny way of accepting democracy.

Our Prime Minister has made a commitment on behalf of all Canadians to keep his promises.

• (1645)

[English]

A promise made by the Prime Minister is a promise kept. Tonight we will vote on that final step of his three promises. Yes,

they must eventually be enshrined through the constitutional process, hopefully as early as April 1997.

The Prime Minister made a promise on behalf of Canadians and I am proud to be able to vote on it today, contrary to the statements of the member for Kootenay East who said that I should be ashamed to vote for this process.

I have sat in the House this week and seen three different members of the Reform Party rise on points of order to indicate that certain members of the House were or were not absent. It shows the level to which Reformers will stoop for political gain.

When it counted, the leader of the Progressive Conservatives, the hon. member of Parliament for Sherbrooke, was there. Madam Speaker, he was in the trenches with you and me in Quebec defending Canada during the delicate moments. I find it despicable that Reform Party members stand day after day to question the participation of the member of Parliament for Sherbrooke.

Where were they on October 27? Where were they during the referendum? Today they have the audacity to stand here and again criticize the government for its initiatives. The Prime Minister responded to initiatives after listening to representations from caucus members and other people on B.C.'s regional veto. It is very important for British Columbia. It is also very important for Ontario to have its veto.

When we talk about the distribution of population we have to respect regional differences in Canada. The member for Kootenay East has the audacity to criticize the way I vote when 50 per cent of his members yesterday voted against recognition of the veto for British Columbia.

It is very easy to criticize. It is very easy to get involved in the debate of always giving into Quebec's demands. However I ask hon. members what it is Quebec has demanded over the past 30 years that it has received.

We have made sacrifices. We have made concessions in the past. I remind members from British Columbia that when British Columbia entered Confederation we made a concession uniquely for British Columbia. We honoured the concession to build a national railway from coast to coast. Otherwise British Columbia would not have entered Confederation.

I remind colleagues from Prince Edward Island that we made a concession for Prince Edward Island. The concession was to recognize that island by granting it four members of Parliament and four senators.

In terms of making a concession to Quebec, Quebecers do not want any more or any less than the rest of the provinces. They want to be recognized for what they are. They want to be given the tools to develop and protect their language and culture. If that means making a concession, it is well worth making it in order to keep our country united and strong.