

Government Orders

I hope the result of this process will be just part of many things that are occurring as Canadians of goodwill, generous of spirit, work toward trying to find a way out of this impasse. Each of us in our own way does not matter very much, but we in this place have been given a responsibility. How we deal with it is going to serve as an example in many ways to Canadians who do not have the kind of opportunity that is being presented to us.

There are some who say that time is too short. There are others who say the battle has already been lost. I do not know if they are prepared to accept the implications of what they say.

Is there anyone in this place, after we go through this exercise, who is prepared to walk out on to the streets of his or her hometown and say: "I didn't do every possible thing that I could do to make sure that this great country stayed together", not to hurt or take away from one group to give to the other and not to be proud and selfish and beat one's chest and say: "I came up with the solution"?

Certainly the Premier of New Brunswick, in the attempt that he and the Government of New Brunswick has put forward to try to find a solution to the impasse, does not see it as a personal solution and hopes that it is just part of the building blocks that are required to get us out of this problem.

The worst thing that can happen to us as Canadians is to somehow think that somebody else is going to do it for us or that somebody else's attitude has to change in order to make it easier to find a solution. We have to start changing our own attitudes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I cannot emphasize enough just how important it is for all parliamentarians to realize, without going into all the details of the motion which has been presented to Parliament and to the House of Commons, that nobody will come up with a magic solution. The only way to solve this problem is to be generous, but more particularly to be committed to continue to build this country—difficult though it may be—which was born under much more trying conditions than those we are facing today.

Mr. Speaker, again I repeat the challenge which I think is central to the motion. I hope every member of the House wants to say: I would like to be part of the parliamentary committee and to be part of the solution. I

want to find a way to solve the problem rather than make it any more complicated than it already is, I want to find ways to suppress certain frustrations and allay certain fears. We have a few months or a few weeks ahead of us, Mr. Speaker, and I would not want to be too dramatic about this. It is not a matter of giving too much importance to what we are doing. We cannot overemphasize the importance of Canada, and this is why I hope that the work of the committee will produce the outcome which all Canadians are hoping for—a way of solving the constitutional dilemma which has endured for too long already.

• (1650)

Mr. François Gérin (Mégantic—Compton—Stansstead): Mr. Speaker, in 1980, when the Quebec government asked its question in the referendum, many of us—or more precisely 60 per cent of us—voted no. Many MPs from Quebec, from all three parties, voted no. Others voted yes. Those who voted no did so because they thought at the time that negotiations between Mr. Lévesque and Mr. Trudeau could hardly be successful due to the intransigent attitudes on both sides. And we thought at the time that, since the issue had finally been resolved and the people had voted in favour of Canada, a constitutional accord could easily be reached. Were we ever surprised, a year and a half later, when the Canadian Constitution was brought back from England without Quebec's agreement.

I don't know if members of Parliament from outside Quebec, some of whom spoke today, realize what a referendum means in terms of discussions and fights between members of one family, of one community, of one village or small town. I don't know if you can imagine how traumatic that experience has been for many Quebecers, and how shocked they were when they suddenly realized that Ottawa had fooled them with fine promises concerning a future Constitution. In the following months, many of us decided to come to Ottawa, to try to repair this injustice, to show Quebecers, 40 per cent of whom had voted "yes", that it was possible for Canada to include Quebec as a distinct society as we know it, with a different language, a different culture, different traditions, a different civil code. So we came here. It seemed to me that 1985–86 was perhaps the ideal time for men like Premier Bourassa and Prime Minister Mulroney, people whose negotiating skills are well known, to reach some understanding. We had the Meech