

*Government Orders*

fact that during the debate at second reading as well as at the report stage several speakers made, to my way of thinking, a fundamental mistake by overlooking an important distinction. Indeed, this debate is on a bill which will provide a referendum tool for the government, but there will be another debate if the government decides to submit a referendum question to the approval of the House of Commons and to consult Canadians.

Yet, a good number of arguments made by members of the New Democratic Party as well as speakers from the Bloc Quebecois may well be pointless, depending on what will happen when the government decides to use this tool that we are giving him with this referendum act.

We do not know if the Canadian government will hold a national referendum in only one province, or a referendum in a number of provinces. The Bloc Quebecois members are up in arms against the government because it might try to move the referendum that should normally be held in the fall in Quebec, under the provincial legislation.

This is merely speculation. The Bloc Quebecois members do not know if this fall, following an agreement between the Canadian and provincial governments, the federal government will use this legislation to hold a consultation only in all the provinces where there is not already a referendum act allowing provincial authorities to hold their own referendum.

I say this: Be patient; you can voice your fears and concerns at that time, if need be, but it is certainly premature to do so now. You are wasting your time because you have no way of knowing for sure how the consultation process will be implemented this fall.

Second, they tell me the Prime Minister has made a statement. Well, the Prime Minister makes statements every day. He once said that he was in favour of a referendum. Then, a few months later, he said that no, he was not totally sold on the idea. The Speech from the Throne included a promise to table a referendum bill. Then, the minister said that no, there would be no such legislation. In the end, we do have a referendum act. I am not about to be concerned by a statement made yesterday by the Prime Minister. The reality is in the legislation. Section 3 of Bill C-81 states clearly that the government can hold a national referendum in all the provinces or only in one province or some. We will see what happens when the government decides to hold its referendum.

Again, I tell our friends from the Bloc Quebecois: Save your breath; there is no need to worry at this point because you do not know what the referendum will be like; when concerns are expressed about the Government of Canada having a referendum and that referendum not being democratic because there will be no umbrella committees. We do not know either whether it will be on a single question or several.

Bill C-81 enables the government to ask one or several questions. Serious legal opinions were received from the Department of Justice as well as from respectable legal firms across the country. The hon. member says they are Tory legal firms. I know for a fact that lawyers with affiliations with all political formations can be found in all major legal firms. In Montreal, they even have *péquiste* lawyers.

Therefore, every major legal firm has someone tuned in all major formations. Personally, I go with the legal opinions provided and they say that government must draft its legislation very carefully so as not to impede on the freedom of association of individuals.

• (1210)

If several questions are asked, it will obviously be extremely difficult to get people to group together under either the yes umbrella or the no umbrella since, there being several questions, some will answer yes to one and no to another. So, if there are only two umbrella committees, one yes and one no, you can be sure it will be impossible to properly categorize everyone under one or the other.

I will remind the hon. members opposed to this bill that it does not repeat word for word what the Quebec legislation passed in 1981 says, where it was perfectly clear that there were to be only two umbrellas: one for the people who wanted Quebec to remain a part of Canada and one for those who wanted Quebec to separate. In that case, there were clearly two umbrellas and only two.

Again, what we have is omnibus legislation allowing the Government of Canada to call referendums on the Constitution of Canada. To those who oppose this bill because it does not specify whether there will be a yes umbrella and a no umbrella, I say: "Hang on, when government will use this piece of legislation to submit constitutional amendments to the approval of the people of Canada, we will see if there is more than one question