

Government Orders

discussions led by the Prime Minister. I remember leaving Ottawa and going to speak to grad ceremonies in my riding and talking about the importance of national unity and how we needed those young people to make their contribution to Canada. That was just a year ago, but that has been a long time in terms of the debate we had in the country on the Constitution.

I say with respect for all of the comments made by learned members and with the effort made by my leader and my party in terms of outlining a broader process to involve more Canadians in the constitutional process, I would hope that after a year we might have done a little more, that maybe tonight rather than debating what may end up to be—we hope it becomes more than that—yet another parliamentary committee. It is unfortunate that tonight we could not have been debating and fine-tuning perhaps the components and aspects of a constituent assembly that I think would go some distance toward showing Canadians that not only do we respect the advice and opinions of Canadians from all walks of life, members of Parliament, members of legislative assemblies, representatives of local governments—a group quite often missed in this debate—but that we want them to be part of a process. A little goes a long way when it comes to showing Canadians that we are prepared to consider their views when we are writing and dealing with the Constitution of Canada.

If there is one constant that we will be faced with from now on, that constant is the change in our Constitution. This is not something that will be resolved by September or the fall of next year, or into 1993 with a spring election. We have the ability to change and to amend our Constitution at home on our own, now.

Others were here before in that historic debate when we brought home, as it was said, our Constitution. So, change is with us constantly now and we have to be prepared to deal with that.

I have mentioned some of the groups that I think can and should be involved in this debate. I have talked about members of legislative assemblies, and I have talked about local governments. Their voice has not been heard a lot lately. I also want to mention because it is so important that aboriginal people in this country have their role as well in the makeup and the writing of our Constitution. We cannot allow another failure in that

area. I hope we have a commitment from this House and others that that will in fact be the case.

We have had an example, one small step perhaps, but an example of what a government can do. I am referring of course to the recent announcement by the Government of Ontario that has signed a statement of a political relationship with the First Nations of Ontario. The Ontario government has done what the President of the Privy Council and the Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs ought to be doing as they continue their discussions with the legitimate leadership of the national aboriginal organizations. Our member who represents Port Alberni has spoken eloquently on this issue previously in the House.

I would hope that as we consider this motion and the debate that we are having that we do look beyond the confines of the rules as we have known them and have become comfortable with. Let us not be afraid to experiment, let us not be afraid to listen to some new ideas.

One new idea we debated this afternoon. The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore presented his bill on referendums and plebiscites. Let us not be afraid to consider a couple of ideas from time to time. We are a young nation. Next year we will be celebrating our 125th birthday and we have many years to go. We have survived a great deal as a country. We will I hope survive our current fracas or discussions. I am hopeful that we will, and I am particularly hopeful of course that in writing this Constitution that we be inclusive, as is being said, that we include aboriginal people and the groups that we have mentioned before. We will not accomplish that—or, I would hope that we have to go some distance to ensure that we do—with the motion before us now.

I would ask that the House give serious consideration to our proposal for a constituent assembly. Our leader has said that it is not perfect. What is? But it is an attempt, a signal if you like, a call on the government to lay out in some detail a message that we are prepared to reach out to Canadians, to have their say, to have their view and to participate in the writing of our Constitution and to share some of that emotion and some of that vision for Canada.

• (2210)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Before I recognize the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park, I would just