

Constitutional Accord

Therefore I urge all Members of the House to support the motion before us today so that this important process can begin without delay.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Murphy: Madam Speaker, it is not my intention to delay the debate, and I apologize to the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray) who I know would like to make a speech. However, I have a concern about the resolution before us. I would like an answer, perhaps not now, but some assurance from the Government House Leader and Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) that the committee would be in a position to consider having hearings in the Northwest Territories and Yukon and perhaps in any province which does not set up its own public hearings.

Public participation was a main aspect of what was promised by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in his speech to the nation on the Langevin agreement. I believe it is important, especially for the two Territories, that there be an opportunity for citizens who cannot afford to come to Ottawa to make public presentations on their concerns.

Mr. Mazankowski: Madam Speaker, the desire has been to try to focus this debate in the nation's capital, as was done before. I think to some extent we are the beneficiaries of some experience that took place in earlier years, where I think the focus of the constitutional process was clearly evident in Room 200 of the West Block. My sense is that there can be provisions made for people who want to travel, if the committee so desires to have certain representatives appear before it.

It is not the intention of the Government to allow the committee to travel, for a number of reasons. We think the logistics and the difficulties in organizing such travel would cause problems which would be almost insurmountable. However, certainly from the standpoint of accommodating people who may want to be heard, I think there can be arrangements made which would hopefully facilitate and satisfy groups such as the Hon. Member indicated.

Mr. Nickerson: Madam Speaker, my question is very much the same, but it is necessary to have it on record.

I am very pleased with the motion before us today. I hope that it receives speedy passage. I think the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) is quite correct when he says that it is not necessary to take this committee through the length and breadth of the country and that the debate should and ought to be centered in Ottawa. However, I would like him to give an assurance, on the record, that there is nothing in this motion that would prevent representatives of the Governments of the Northwest Territories and Yukon from appearing before this committee and stating their case. As we all know, before the Langevin Accord can be acceptable to the people in the north, there are certain changes which ought to be made.

• (1030)

Mr. Mazankowski: Madam Speaker, the short answer to that is, it is almost axiomatic that they would have the opportunity to appear, if they so desire.

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, I understand that there are a number of provinces in which public hearings may not be held. If all provinces were to have public hearings, then the necessity of taking a committee across the country would seem to me to be entirely alleviated. Can the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) indicate to us at this time which provinces, to the best of his knowledge, will be holding public hearings? Would he entertain a suggestion that in those areas of the country where people will not have the opportunity to come forward and to speak to a level of elected representatives that one might contemplate a subcommittee at least of this committee travelling to that particular province?

Mr. Mazankowski: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member, although well-intentioned, poses a bit of a hypothetical question. As he said, some provinces may not hold hearings. We are not sure of that. There have been discussions—

Mr. Murphy: How about Alberta?

Mr. Mazankowski: The preliminary indication is that that may not take place. But I am not sure that that is the final answer. So it is very difficult to make any assessment as to whether all provinces or some provinces will be holding such public hearings.

To some extent the committee will be the master of its own house. It has the opportunity of setting up subcommittees to do certain elements of work. Perhaps that might be something that may be considered further on down the road.

I want to repeat again that I think it is very important, given the importance of this issue, and to ensure that the focus is centred around a committee that is genuinely disposed of dealing with this issue, to have things concentrated in one area. As evidenced by the experience of the past, it worked quite well. There was a fair amount of accommodation and give and take. I am not sure whether there was any great outcry for the committee at that time to travel across the country, I know that it was suggested. I think that, generally speaking, it was felt that everyone who wanted to be heard during the course of that process was heard. That would be our intention in this particular case as well.

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, if I may say so, I find that a rather garbled response.

Mr. Mazankowski: It was a garbled question.

Mr. Johnston: I do not think that it was especially garbled. The point is that when it is learned that there will not be public hearings in those provinces will the Deputy Prime Minister give his support to the concept of sending at least a subcommittee of this committee to those provinces? In this way those