

*Government Orders*

A further question I would have for the government would be why this bill does not provide for a truly national vote. Why has the government allowed for the possibility of asking different questions in different regions or provinces, or for the possibility of conducting the vote in only specific provinces or regions while omitting others? Bill C-81 could enable the government to propose a question or questions nationally or in one or more provinces. What is the government's rationale for this move?

Perhaps the government believes on the one hand that the views of the residents of particular provinces or regions are more important than those who live in other provinces or regions. On the other hand the government may want to use this provision as a strong arm tactic or weapon to pressure reluctant but principled premiers into succumbing to the will of the federal government.

Still yet another possibility is that the government would like to hold a separate referendum in the provinces outside Quebec so that English and French Canada may be denied the opportunity for an intelligent and meaningful dialogue with each other on the country's constitutional aspirations. Whatever its reasons the government has erred on this count.

If members on the other side of the House believe in the equality of all citizens regardless of where they live in this great country they will do the right thing and conduct this proposed referendum on a national scale.

As an extension, if the government wants to show Canadians that it believes in the equality of all provinces it will hold any constitutional referendum in each and every province.

I am not sure whether the government believes in the equality of all provinces but this is certainly a prime opportunity to show Canadians where they stand on this question.

It is essential on important matters such as constitutional amendments that a national referendum be paramount over advisory provincial referenda. One question should be asked everywhere at the same time, not a set of different questions extending over a period of time.

As a protection of regional interests, approval of the amendment should require a majority vote in at least

two-thirds of the provinces and a majority of all votes cast nation-wide.

The current amending formula provides for the most fair and equitable protection of regional interests. It did not just pop up out of nowhere. It was arrived at after years of deliberation and academic argument. Thus far it has allowed for a fair expression of regional interests.

I cannot see much value in tinkering now in order to apply some special regional vote to this upcoming particular set of amendments.

The four-region concept being talked about has been thrown around before in constitutional deliberations. It was inevitably rejected because it did not recognize the equality of the provinces. The government must now acknowledge the equality and ensure that any future amendments require the seven and fifty formula for approval.

Finally I come to the issue of the referendum question itself. The government has given no indication in Bill C-81 what the question might look like or how it might even be arrived at.

The government House leader has said it is possible to have more than one question. Perhaps it is this government's intention to submit a myriad of questions to the electorate in order to obtain a nebulous body of results from which the government can then pick and choose its desired conclusion.

In this case the government may not only take the referendum as an advisory one, but it may also manipulate and interpret the results for purely partisan reasons. What guarantee do we have that in Bill C-81 the government will not just do this, ignoring the whole purpose of a referendum which is to elicit the will of the people, not of the government?

I am also concerned about the provisions that would allow us only three days of debate when it comes time to draft the wording of this question. I cannot imagine why the government would want to invoke closure before the debate has even begun, unless of course it is not interested in what anyone else has to say or what the results might be. I am sure there are at least some democrats over there who would be interested in what others have to say about a proposed question. If the government wants to act unilaterally on this one it