

Government Orders

every single, solitary one of those free votes was on private members' business. There was no exception. The whip has been on when it came to government business. Any member who voted against the government whip, against the wishes of the Prime Minister, has been banished, chastised and disciplined. It is absolutely and totally contrary to what the red book told Canadians. It said that this government would be different and there would be free votes.

Why vote? It almost leaves me to ask: Why have a House of Commons? Why do we come here, as we have today, realizing that the debate which started at approximately 3.30 this afternoon will be terminated by the Liberals at 5.15 p.m.? The bill will substantively change the Constitution of Canada. I say: Shame on the Liberals. There is no excuse for this kind of pile-driving and ramrodding of legislation.

I suspect that my words have fallen on deaf ears on the Liberal side. They just do not understand. They do not even show up for the debates. I cannot comprehend where their head space might be.

What can I say? When the Reform Party is elected to government in 1997 it will repeal this bunch of legislation, which is so divisive, so discredited, so damaging and, I suggest, so deceitful. The Reform Party will ensure that any future changes to constitutional law will include the provision that the people of Canada will have a say over their Constitution by way of one person, one vote. That is democracy. That is the Reform way.

• (1635)

Mr. Nick Discepola (Vaudreuil, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to participate in the final moments of debate prior to what is, in my opinion, an historic vote.

What a difference almost four weeks makes. It is very easy to speak here today knowing the result of the vote on October 30. I would first like to thank the hundreds and thousands of Canadians who came from all corners of Canada on October 27. In my opinion, this bill is their bill. It responds to the wishes of Canadians as does the distinct society recognition that we voted on earlier this week. It is a response to Canadians who on October 27 demonstrated clearly their love and affection for Canada.

I am appalled that the member for Kootenay East insinuated that the only reason we Liberals are going to vote in favour of the bill is because of junkets, of freebies. It shows a lack of respect for Canadians when he denigrates the bill and the vote to that degree. It also shows a lack of understanding. If the member for Kootenay East would only listen to us and read the red book for a change instead of just referring to it, he would know that the Liberal Party has always respected the right of veto for Quebec and has for over 30 years recognized its distinct character.

The member for Kootenay East and others have criticized the Prime Minister for not having consulted Canadians. On the contrary, the people of Canada spoke on October 27, and when

he saw the testimony by all Canadians, the Prime Minister read the people correctly. That was true democracy.

He promised the people of Canada and on their behalf promised Quebec prior to October 30 to recognize Quebec for what it is. If Canadians cannot accept that Quebec has a unique culture, unique language, a unique civil code and other institutions, then we are truly in serious trouble.

Reform Party members are falling into the trap that has been laid for them by the current Leader of the Opposition by saying that they will repeal the legislation. I can say that hindsight is 50:50. Imagine if the result had been different on October 30. I wonder if the members who have spoken on the bill would speak the same way.

The Prime Minister could not consult Canadians. He could not telephone Premier Harris or Premier Harcourt or even Premier Klein. But these same premiers spoke to Quebecers.

I remember the appeal by Mr. Klein to Quebecers saying: "We love you Quebec. Stay in Canada". I remember the appeal by Mr. Harris who said to Quebecers: "Your demands for the revision of the decentralization devolution of responsibilities are our demands. We will work hand in hand with you in Quebec because your aspirations for a renewed federation are our aspirations". The Prime Minister could not take the time to consult the premiers. He had to make a decision. He relied on his experience, on his knowledge and understanding of the country and of the great province of Quebec and made three promises which tonight we will uphold. Those promises were the recognition of the distinct society, the regional veto and decentralization.

• (1640)

If we recognize, as it seems to have been generally accepted across Canada, Quebec's distinctiveness, then we must also recognize that Quebec needs all the tools to protect and promote its language and its culture.

An Albertan, a British Columbian or anyone else living in the rest of Canada is not threatened with the loss of culture or the English language. On the contrary, it is in use worldwide. However, as a co-founding people of this great country it has to be recognized that the French language and the French culture that exists in Quebec must be protected. The only way to protect that is to give the people of Quebec the veto. That veto is of utmost importance.

The current Constitution says that seven provinces representing 50 per cent of the population can amend the Constitution. That means seven provinces could gang up on British Columbia, seven provinces could gang up on Quebec, as happened in 1980, seven provinces could gang up on another province. That is why the veto is so important for Quebec.

[Translation]

I do not agree with what the member for Portneuf says about these three promises being far from sufficient and not what Quebecers wanted before the referendum. The veto proposed by our Prime Minister protects Quebec even more; from now on