

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I will not have the opportunity to participate in this debate because there is not enough time. I would have liked to express my views on this bill, but since there is not enough time, I will ask a question of the member for Jonquière.

If there is a referendum, does the hon. member think that the Prime Minister, or the federal or provincial authorities, must first give Canadians a clear and precise idea of how the result of that exercise will be interpreted? Let me explain.

I want the member to tell me what he thinks of the double majority. I want him to tell me what he thinks of the proposal made by the Liberal Party, which was rejected by the parliamentary committee—he was there—because I know that he was an active member of that committee. He made a great contribution to the work of the committee. The resolution calling for a double majority was rejected because it was beyond the legislative framework proposed by the government. But I am still of the opinion that the Prime Minister of the country must make a statement before the referendum to the effect that if a region of the country, whether it is the Atlantic region, Quebec, Ontario, or the west, has a majority opposing this project, the Prime Minister will not in any way implement it.

Does he agree that the importance of the regions in this country is fundamentally what makes Canada? In my opinion, there are two elements that shape this country and that are fundamental: First and foremost, the linguistic duality, because it is there and it must be recognized and, second, regionalism because it is a fact and a Canadian reality.

Does the member agree that regionalism must in this referendum process be the paramount consideration for the Prime Minister of the country when he will interpret the result of the referendum?

Mr. Blackburn (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform my colleague that what he says was part of the

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amendments I tabled both before the legislative committee and in this House. Here is what I proposed:

If a referendum is held in all the provinces of Canada, the Senate or the House of Commons shall not adopt any resolution authorizing the Governor General to issue a proclamation in order to amend the Constitution of Canada where the amendment would directly or indirectly be contrary to the opinion expressed, in a referendum, by a majority of voters in Canada and in each of the four main regions.

Then they are described in detail.

This was part of the amendments other opposition members proposed in various terms at different moments. I dearly wish, you can understand, that party leaders in this House would commit themselves to this. It is presently their prerogative to decide. That is why I wanted the bill amended.

Moreover, and I felt this was important, an amendment of this kind would prevent any premier from declaring: "The decision taken by the people of my province will be binding upon me". Let us take Newfoundland as an example. If this commitment was made in a referendum where there is no regional majority, and the people of Newfoundland said no, our goose would be cooked. There can no longer be a veto for Quebec because unanimity is required.

This is why I was referring to a regional majority in order to protect not only the province of Quebec but the three other regions also, and avoid situations of the kind I just described.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu): I would like to make a comment directed at the hon. member for Jonquière. I would like to draw his attention to what was said on January 31, 1979, by one of his former colleagues, the hon. Roch La Salle. The subject was the referendum proposed by the Liberal Party, which was in power at the time.

Never has such a large Quebec group been so weak in the Liberal caucus. Never has a 60-member group from Quebec betrayed so often the vital interests of the province of Quebec. This needs to be said, Mr. Speaker, and a bill is not going to solve those problems.

He was talking about a possible referendum bill. Ironic, is it not? Mr. Roch La Salle, that same January 31, 1979, said also:

The Prime Minister, in the wake of his fiasco and monumental failure on the political and economic fronts, has designed this tool to enhance his image as the great savior of confederation. Actually he is responsible for and the originator of our present problems with his team riding his coattails and not daring to speak up.

• (1630)

It seems to me this is almost prophetic as far as you are concerned, the hon. member for Jonquière. Note that, as a Conservative member of Parliament, Mr. La Salle had guts when he was on the opposition side. That time is over. He was not ashamed of standing up and talking.