

Government Orders

sees this happen on a regular basis. This is a fundamental, important and very practical problem.

Should an agreement formally signed by first ministers for tabling in a legislature be considered a confidence measure on which governments can or should fall? It seems to me that is a very important question which should be considered.

The paper also discusses various alternatives to the current legislative model of constitutional reform. For example, the decision-making role of legislators could be shared with or transferred to Canadians across the nation expressing themselves through a referendum.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mulroney: Or Canadians might be called upon, for example, to select delegates to play a decisive role in proposing amendments or in ratifying amendments in a constituent assembly.

As the Australian experience has demonstrated, referenda can be used for constitutional amendment in a parliamentary federal system. Obviously all members of the House would have not only observations but serious questions in regard to this procedure itself. Some of them I think would probably be, if Canada decided to go that route, what sort of a majority would be needed for an amendment proposal to pass: a simple national majority; a national majority including a majority in a majority of provinces, such as some of the provisions we now have; a national majority with a majority in Quebec on certain issues or in other regions on others?

With respect to a constituent assembly model, a number of important questions automatically arise. Should there be equality of representation of the provinces, representation on the basis of population, or a compromise between the two? What should be the procedure within the constituent assembly for reaching decisions? Should its decisions be binding, or could its decisions then be altered by a subsequent meeting of the same body or a new body to which it allegedly reports? Should they be put to the people in a referendum? Or, should they be recommendations for consideration by first ministers and possible action through the legislative model itself?

These are all important questions but fundamentally I believe they stem from one basic challenge. Can we in this House of Commons make this Constitution of ours the expression of our profound attachment to Canada

and our will to ensure that it becomes more harmonious and more dynamic? That is the challenge.

Can we do better for Canada? Can we make sure that Canada works effectively and well? That is the challenge, and I think the answer to that is yes.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

• (1130)

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, when I announced the creation of the citizens' forum on November 1, I said that it is time to consider making reforms to our system that are "bold, far-reaching and unprecedented if need be". This government is committed to modernizing Canada's Constitution.

The citizens' forum is a new way of going about this process that will help identify what kind of country Canadians want. Typically, like anything new in this country, it attracts a certain amount of criticism. But my guess is that when Commissioner Spicer and his colleagues report, having spoken to the people who were left out in the past, after they talk to ordinary Canadians across the country, I think the results they will bring forward are going to be infinitely more beneficial than opinions of constitutional scholars and lawyers. We have heard enough from them in this country and not enough from ordinary citizens.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mulroney: The citizens' forum will give western Canadians an opportunity to articulate their genuine frustrations with a system of government that seems remote and unresponsive to their needs. That applies in many cases doubly to citizens of the north.

It will ask Canadians in far-flung regions how best they believe they can influence the decision-making process to ensure that it functions in a more equitable manner. It will allow all Canadians to discuss the relationship between Quebec and the rest of the country, and the accommodations required in today's Canada for the needs of both linguistic minorities and majorities to be respected.

The impact of regionalism and of multiculturalism on Canadian unity and economic development will also be examined. There was a time and not so long ago, perhaps