

The Constitution

● (2050)

We believe that Parliament and the representatives of the people should make those decisions on moral grounds. Therefore, we are moving the following amendment:

Nothing in this Charter affects the authority of Parliament to legislate in respect of abortion and capital punishment.

We believe we have given to the House and to Canadians a way out of the division, to reach consensus, to improve the charter, and once we have a certain amount of consensus, to bring the Constitution home.

I should like to take a look at the NDP amendments. They have the one on equality of men and women and also the one on aboriginal rights. When I take a look at my telegrams I see that in no way do the aboriginal people of Canada feel that the NDP is protecting their rights by its amendments. Not one group does. Why not? It was because they either wanted a consent clause or to be part of the amending formula. The hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent)—

Mr. Clark: Speaking for the west.

Mr. Epp: I suppose he speaks for the west or for whoever. He said to the Indian people, "I see why you feel you are not protected, but I will move nothing which does not first enjoy the approval of the government". That was his position and remains his position today. That is called parliamentary courage! The aboriginal question will not be resolved by a simple amendment. It will not be solved because of its history and its complexity. Therefore, the only way we will get to a satisfactory amendment is to sit down, either in a constituent assembly or at a first ministers' meeting, and bring in the aboriginal people in order to come up with a compromise and a negotiated solution. It will not happen with the NDP amendment, and it will not happen during these three days on the floor of the House.

I am sorry I do not have sufficient time to go through the various nuances of the amendments, but in conclusion I say that what we have proposed is consistent with our view of federalism, namely, that change must come and we welcome change.

Mr. Broadbent: Not yet.

Mr. Epp: Yes, we do. I enjoy the interventions of the hon. member for Oshawa. He made as much sense today as he ever has, so we do not have to measure it for very long.

We believe that federalism is better served by a compromise and by defining consensus, and once having done that, we can improve the charter. If members of the government search their consciences, I believe they will see the merits of the case. I know from speaking to many of them that they are seeking the way to get around the division which they see arising because of the manner in which they proceeded. It is for that reason and for Canada that I believe these amendments should be passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member.

Mr. Peter Stollery (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I have listened for the second time to the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp), and I must say that I am as confused as I was the first time I heard him some months ago.

An hon. Member: As always.

Mr. Towers: So what is new?

Mr. Stollery: Hon. members opposite are laughing. I would presume they are laughing at anybody who, at this point in our undertakings, suggests that we should go to a constituent assembly after five or six months of consideration. After the spectacle of last week, the member suggested that we should sit down with the first ministers once again. What can one say? It is very difficult to take seriously the proposals of the hon. member for Provencher. I am sure the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) will deal with this more thoroughly in view of the fact that the Conservative Party has tabled an omnibus amendment which contains a series of proposals that they know perfectly well cannot pass. In fact, during this debate they have spoken out of both sides of their mouths. On the one hand they said they were in favour of a charter of rights, and on the other hand they put conditions which make it impossible for Canadians to have a charter of rights.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stollery: This is the sort of spectacle to which we have been treated since last October. Now the leading spokesman of the Conservative Party suggests with a straight face that we should go to a constituent assembly.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): You did not even read the proposal.

Mr. Stollery: As other hon. members have pointed out, it is a great privilege to participate in this historic stage in the evolution of Canadian constitutional development. Here we are in 1981 taking, in the Canadian House of Commons, the long overdue final steps toward becoming a complete nation. We are succeeding in Canada at what few, if any, nations in the world have achieved. When we pass this resolution, we will have become a nation with our own Constitution which reflects our federal nature in a manner consistent with a great nation, the sixth or seventh most industrialized country of the western world, with two languages, English and French, representing two of the great cultures that have developed in the western world since the fall of Rome.

Mr. Stevens: Who wrote this?

Mr. Stollery: We will have guaranteed future generations of Canadians an important charter of fundamental rights and freedoms, consistent with what we as Canadians believe our country stands for.