

diplomats and, most importantly, conflict between the Prime Minister and his colleagues in the House of Commons.

This Prime Minister does not accept as a matter of personal choice and preference the two basic and founding principles of our Canadian constitutional system. The first principle is that Canada is a federal state governed by both a national government and a provincial government for each of our ten provinces. In contrast, Canada is not a unitary state with a single, centralized government, as is the United Kingdom.

The second principle is that the form of government in Canada is a parliamentary democracy in which the Prime Minister is first among equals and holds office only with the consent and concurrence of his parliamentary equals. Again in contrast, our government is not of the republican form wherein the head of state is elected to hold executive office, with the powers and duties of that office separate and apart from the authority of the legislative component, as in the United States.

To put the matter in more mundane terms, the Prime Minister of Canada or, indeed, of any nation governed by the British parliamentary form of government is not justified in assuming he has, as a person and as an office holder, the support of the people, or to assume, as the Prime Minister did, that he "only had the people behind him".

Let us talk about the people of Canada who the Prime Minister of Canada has behind him. What the Prime Minister has behind him and beside him are 142 Members of Parliament, or a clear parliamentary majority in the House of Commons, who proved by their election that they had the support of a plurality, not a majority, of those who voted in their respective constituencies. Indeed, if one counted Canadian noses one would find it very difficult to establish a mandate based on support of the population for the Prime Minister, or for any of his predecessors other than the Right Hon. John George Diefenbaker. Everyone agrees that the former right hon. member for Prince Albert won a tremendous personal mandate in addition to an overwhelming parliamentary majority.

Let us count the people behind the Prime Minister. First, there are just under 24 million people in Canada. Second, there were only 15.8 million registered voters. Third, only 69 per cent of the registered voters, or 10.9 million, voted. Fourth, only 4.8 million of those voters voted for the Prime Minister's party, only 1.3 million more than the 3.5 million who voted for the Progressive Conservative Party. The end result is that if the Prime Minister has a mandate it is from less than 20 per cent of the Canadian people.

Let us not confuse election success with the support of the people. Many of us are well aware that we were elected by a plurality of voters and not the majority. We are well aware that we must earn popular support and work hard to maintain it. Popularity among Canadians, either nationally or in any federal constituency, cannot be assumed from election results. I firmly believe that no one in Canada should know that better than our Prime Minister. He assumed wide and national popularity from an election victory when his party received 44 per cent of the votes of those who voted, 30 per cent of the

votes of the total electorate but, most importantly, a minute 20 per cent of the votes of the Canadian population.

The Prime Minister now knows the real answer. Over 65 per cent of the Canadian population is opposed to the constitutional proposal. This result was established and confirmed by scientific polls, the very polls upon which he formerly based his assumption of broad support.

I have said, and I repeat, that Canadians are not opposed to the principle of constitutional change and reform. They are opposed to the person who demands that this change be made now in the United Kingdom Parliament, not in Canada by Canadians. That person is the Prime Minister of Canada.

I have taken some pains to qualify and characterize the popular support for the constitutional proposal. My conclusion is based on sound facts. The Prime Minister has the electoral support of 20 per cent of the people of Canada according to the 1980 election statistics. According to the scientific polls, as I have said, 65 per cent or more of the Canadian population oppose constitutional changes beyond simple patriation. This is the sum and substance of public support for the constitutional proposals.

Let me record the fact that I am well aware many Canadians from coast to coast want change. Many Canadians, particularly those whose origins are outside the British Commonwealth system, want constitutional guarantees and safeguards. Many want rights and basic freedoms enshrined in a bill of rights or a charter of rights. But it would be a cruel deception to offer those well-meaning Canadians a piece of paper, a mere written document approved by the parliament of another country—words with no spirit, statements of right which have no concurrence or that do not stem from a consensus within Canada. That forces us to consider the process and procedure for constitutional change in Canada, and whether the traditional process and procedure has been honoured in the proposal for constitutional change.

● (1710)

An hon. member referred to the shallow argument about process and said that our arguments were not directed to the substance of the proposal. That member and, I am afraid, many members do not understand the meaning of constitutional process. They do not understand that it is equally as important as the substance of the constitutional provisions because it is that process that brings about within Canada the consent and concurrence of the people which is the support for the provisions sought to be enacted. Without that support, consent and concurrence the proposals and provisions are shallow and meaningless and will not be accepted by the people.

On a recent occasion in this House my colleague in the adjoining constituency of Halifax (Mr. Regan) made some remarks about the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) and his arguments on the Constitution. Let me say very clearly that I was ashamed of my colleague from Halifax but very proud of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition in the stand he has taken on the constitutional proposal.