

written on Canada, on the Constitution or constitutional reform, and on the way to remake the country in order to change the things that seem to stand correcting.

My Quebec colleagues will no doubt forgive me for a few minutes if I try to bring you up to date on what has happened in Quebec and place you in the context of the November 15, 1976 election. As you know, I participated in that election. It is needless for me to tell you the results. Anyway, if you went through the election, as I did, it is crystal clear that on November 15, 1976 the province of Quebec did not put a separatist party in power. What happened was there were so many grievances against the government or governments that the impossible happened.

Well, many of you know politics, and you know full well that when the electorate is unhappy, the first candidate who shows up gets it in the kisser, because nobody makes a fine distinction between jurisdictions, the Olympics, the dairy policy and indeed all the problems that may arise such as strikes in hospitals and schools, inflation, unemployment and what have you. The electorate will have a mass reaction when dissatisfied with the way it is being governed. I am not saying that Mr. Bourassa was responsible for all of that; I am just saying that he is the one who received the blow. And a severe blow it was, for he lost over half of his seats, retaining only some forty of them.

I am not saying either that the November 15 Quebec election was not an important one, honourable senators; in fact, that a separatist party should be in power in Quebec is very significant. This very fact is big with consequences. Therefore, I must not ignore it. But I suggest that this is not the true will of the people. If you consider what the political situation was in the province of Quebec on November 15, 1976, you will realize that the PQ was the only party which could really take advantage of the people's discontent. It was the only one which was well organized. In the Union Nationale party, Mr. Bellemare who had been elected following a by-election was practically alone. On the other hand, Social Crediters were also nearing the point of extinction. Therefore, what was left? Only the PQ, which was well organized, not only at the National Assembly level, but also within the various counties.

In order to gain the people's confidence and not scare the voters away, it came up with a great assurance which could be summarized as follows—certainly a master stroke: Gentlemen, voting for us is not voting for separation. It is voting against the Bourassa administration. The referendum will come later. So there are a great many people who voted against the Bourassa administration and for the PQ party who were not at all PQ sympathizers. It is a fact that many English-speaking Montrealers voted for the PQ, whether you like it or not. It was the only logical move. They rationalized: When and if a referendum is held, we will put an end to this movement. However, when a party forms a government and administers a budget of some \$12 billion, you realize that many things may happen on the way.

[Senator Marchand.]

Therefore, there are two assurances of the PQ government which we must keep in mind. The first one is that a referendum will be held on the separation issue. The second one is that the Quebec government would behave until such time like any other ordinary government, which it has failed to do, unfortunately.

● (1440)

[English]

I do not think that the PQ government behaved in the manner of a normal provincial government. I could give many examples of this. For instance, you know that they even refused to participate in a meeting at which the Honourable André Ouellet was the speaker—and Mr. Ouellet is not someone from Calgary; his home is in Charlesbourg, Quebec. Of course, any provincial minister could have gone and said he thought that the federal government should be out of this field. That is something that could be discussed. However, the attitude that was taken was one of refusal, and not only in that case but at certain international conferences too. Mr. Louis O'Neill refused to participate in the federal-provincial conference on communications.

To tell me that they respected the word they gave to the population of Quebec is not correct. I regret saying it, but they did not respect their word. So right now, while we read many good things, such as the speeches of Senator Lamontagne and Senator Forsey and certain articles in the newspapers, the thing which worries me is that I have never seen in the history of the world a country which can be changed in that manner without terrible cost. It is not sufficient to simply decide to sit around a table and modify the whole thing, unless it is after a crisis of some kind like a civil war, or a war.

[Translation]

A great French author once said:

What is a border? A border is usually drawn as a result of a war or as an indication of a balance of forces.

Such is the definition of a border. So whenever things are explained to me I want to understand them because I take them seriously. I may be wrong but I would like someone to tell me clearly what precisely is the proposal. For instance, when the Parti Québécois says it is in favour of sovereignty-association, well, it is quite hypothetical. Indeed no one in Canada has ever given any definition of these terms. On what would agreement be reached, on what association, under what terms and conditions? No one knows. When people go to the polls, they will not know on what they have to vote. They will not know what kind of country they are building. Do you believe such an effort of the mind is possible? There is only one way, I suggest, only one way that is honest, proper and frank under the circumstances: there must be a referendum to answer a "yes or no" question. Are we to preserve this country or to separate it? Afterwards, we shall sit down if necessary and discuss together what our new country should be. This is, in my view, the only way to proceed if we do not want to be in a mess.