

The Constitution

important to do that. We have had our fights. We have had our contention. Let us let that drop. I plead that tonight we pass this motion unanimously and send it to committee in that spirit.

As I have already said, we are prepared to support the amendment to change the date by which the committee is to report. We will be doing so if it comes to a vote. Maybe there can even be some negotiations between now and one o'clock based on the plea which I have been making, that it is time to deal seriously, honestly and in good faith with this issue. As I say, I would like to see it go to the committee in that spirit so the things which have already been agreed upon will be amendments which the committee can put through and that other things can be done as well. There may be others. It has not been a good three-week period in Parliament but if we send it to the committee in a proper way we can yet come up with a good constitution and be proud of a job well done.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, this is the third time I have had the opportunity of speaking formally to the House. The first occasion was in speaking to second reading of the Municipal Grants Act. At that time I made the comment that I thought the quick passage of that act was a good omen for the future of the country, a good omen for the future of renewed federalism. It demonstrated a willingness on the part of this level of government to recognize the responsibilities of the other two levels of government and it was a step toward co-operation between governments.

On that occasion, which happened to be the evening of the Quebec referendum, I had the opportunity to comment on the significance of the referendum vote. I offered one caution, I suggested that if we were to be successful in our thrust toward a renewed federalism, there was a heavy responsibility on the part of the provinces to match the demonstrated will that evening of this level of government. It had to be a will that addressed not only the problems of Quebec but also the question of bettering and encouraging other provinces into the process of building a better Canada.

Unhappily, the provinces have failed to rise to the occasion, as evidenced by the way in which certain of the provincial premiers fell into the spider's web woven at last month's first ministers' conference by one of their members whose political *raison d'être* has been and continues to be the setting up of his province as a separate entity outside of Canada, albeit with the retention of all the benefits of this confederation. The spider's web has continued to enmesh more of the premiers, culminating in the recent announcement by five in number, an announcement which seems particularly ironic in light of the fact that the premiers have expressed their intention to take their perceived grievances to the courts, the same recourse which they allegedly abhor in the context of the proposed charter of rights and freedoms. It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that Canada's elected first ministers have tried 13 times since 1927 to patriate, to bring reform to the British

North America Act. Our proposed resolution takes the best from those attempts. It offers the Canadian people a doorway through a stone wall created by the requirement of unanimity—unanimous approval of all of the ministers for constitutional renewal and independence. Unfortunately, but predictably, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) overreacts to our proposal by calling for a made-in-Canada constitution. What, might I ask, are we doing in this place right now, the Parliament of Canada, the one great democratic institution representing all Canadians, addressing the subject? We are, Mr. Speaker, doing exactly what the Leader of the Opposition asks that we do.

There has been alarmist talk about our proposal, destroying the federal system in Canada and destroying the country. Any attempt at undermining the orderly and rational development of Canada as a truly independent nation does not come from this side of the House. What we are seeking is not to destroy the federation, but a "fetteration", a hobbling of the Canadian people by the unanimity rule that I have referred to, that has kept us back these many years.

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Under our proposal the federal system remains intact. There is no lessening of provincial powers to the benefit of the federal government. In fact, in the long run the opposite may well be the case. All we are intent on doing, once and for all, is to bid farewell to the nineteenth century and to prepare this country for the twenty-first century. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) describes our plans in the words of Premier Davis of Ontario as, "The first sensible steps to renew our unity and to revive our nationhood."

As I mentioned earlier, and as many speakers on the subject have noted, there have been numerous attempts over a period of 53 years to modernize the Canadian Constitution. To a degree that is understandable. No one expects to construct a fine institution in a hurry. We realize that anything worthwhile takes time. When we consider, for example, the ongoing renovations to this superb building in which we are now, gathered, the parliamentary Centre Block, which has been the meeting place of the elected representatives of our country, consequent upon the great fire of 1916, it is easy to understand that the building of any institution, whether it is physical, ideological, social or political, does not happen overnight.

You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, that modifications to the Peace Tower are currently under way. It was built in memorial to the contribution made by Canadians in the First World War. The 53-bell carillon which has delighted residents and tourists alike for more than half a century, was inaugurated, interestingly, on July 1, 1927, for the diamond jubilee of confederation. Ironically, the first major overhaul of the Peace Tower is taking place 53 years after its completion, the same time frame in which Canadian people have been trying to initiate a major overhaul of their constitution. The renovations