

*The Constitution*

I am happy to take part in this debate as a representative of a generation that is eager to make of this vast land of ours a country in which freedom and good faith are the very foundation of future discussions and future development.

Mr. Speaker, I have taken the time to ask the opinion of some people in my riding to ascertain whether the proposal put forth by the government reflected a heartfelt desire for change in the population and whether these people accepted the resolution proposed by the government in this fall of 1980. People very freely and sincerely replied that it was high time someone did something in this country and that it was time that leadership asserted itself.

For much too long, passivity has been the common name for this constitutional debate. Of course, whenever people meet, be they provincial premiers or the Prime Minister of Canada, each has legitimate interests to uphold. But there is one important thing to remember and that is that these interests must converge, in other words the whole of the country must benefit as much as possible from the efforts of each of these first ministers. And it is this aspect which has eluded those who have run the country in the past and those who, at present, oppose the decision to proceed with the patriation of the constitution.

I can say quite openly and sincerely, Mr. Speaker, that I am under no pressure from above or below to support this proposed resolution. I do so with conviction, with decisiveness, because I am certain that among all imperfect means it is still the best to achieve a breakthrough towards a new start for this country. We are at the crossroads and I sincerely believe that we cannot backtrack.

I can understand that the opposition parties and even some other well-meaning individuals are against the conditions attached to patriation, I can understand the sensitivities of other people, but I am convinced that if each and every one of us examined their motives we would all agree that the time has come to set aside partisan interests in order to find the best formula to put an end not only to 53 years of hesitation, 53 years of impatience, but to 113 years of efforts to rejuvenate this constitution and bring it home and make it Canadian.

In what frame of mind has this measure been undertaken? Are people asking themselves this question, what motivated those who have initiated this measure? This action has been undertaken in the wake of successive efforts at reaching an agreement among first ministers. It started in 1927 to be precise. Efforts were made again in 1931, 1935, 1936, 1950, 1961, 1964, 1971, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1979 and 1980. And always with the same result, just like a yo-yo that goes up and down but never stops. There has never been an agreement for the good of all. That is precisely where the mistake lies now, on the part of the official opposition and those who are against this measure, for they want to keep searching indefinitely for an ideal means while it has been amply demonstrated that this is not feasible. It is so true that in the democratic system of

government the law of the majority prevails when total and absolute majority cannot be achieved. In a type of negotiation where two levels of government are involved, it is a lot to expect all these premiers to agree, all of them at the same time on the same items. This is why, following the attempts of an openly separatist and equally hypocritical party, the Canadian government has had to set in motion a process to patriate the constitution. This is a moral commitment, which was very firm, and for those who followed the various stages of the referendum campaign in Quebec, I should simply like to quote briefly from a statement made by the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in Quebec City on May 14, 1980. When people are speaking of moral commitment, when people are wondering about our being justified in acting this way today, reference should be made to that statement which is crystal clear, and which Quebecers know very well. Mr. Trudeau said, and I quote: "If the answer to the referendum question is No, we have all said that this no would be interpreted as a mandate to change the constitution in order to renew our federalism." That I did not say. Neither did Mr. Clark, nor Mr. Broadbent, nor even the nine premiers of the other provinces. The 75 hon. members who were elected in that province to go and represent them in Ottawa said No and this means we want some change.

Further, Mr. Trudeau said in conclusion, and I quote: "I know because I talked to those hon. members this morning, I know that I can commit myself most firmly that if the answer is "no"—"—and note this—

—we will immediately set in motion the mechanism to renew the constitution, and we will not stop until it is done.

It is precisely this moral commitment which has triggered the admittedly rapid procedure designed to patriate the constitution. But before we got to the present stage, throughout the summer, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) travelled from one provincial capital to another in order to prepare yet another constitutional conference where we might reach an agreement. For three months, week after week, justice ministers of various provinces met nonstop with the Minister of Justice of Canada in an attempt to find a common ground.

Moreover, in September, another constitutional conference was held to determine the exact position of various heads of government regarding constitutional renewal. Instead of presenting the Canadian government with a counter offer, the provincial premiers chose once again to devise a formula leading to a deadlock. That is to say they chose to deal with purely provincial concerns instead of taking a comprehensive view of the situation which directly concerns all Canadians.

● (1450)

And this government has a broader role to play in the House of Commons, the undivided role of representing all Canadians. True, this order of government has a role equal to the one played by the provinces, but a different one, even though it is