

federal government's pledge to initiate immediate steps for patriation and amendment of the Constitution. Some went further and openly supported the promise that, if the No forces were to win—that is, if a majority of Quebecers voted to remain in Canada and give federalism another chance—they would help see to it that prompt constitutional change was forthcoming.

Well, optimistic Quebec voters took them at their word and the referendum result passed into history. And almost immediately, it appears, the hedging began.

Is it really possible, one wonders, that the rest of Canada really believes that one such referendum vote has wiped out any threat to Canadian unity? Can governments and electorates actually convince themselves that Quebec's fears, malaise, unrest and the independence movement itself have now been laid to rest and the remainder of the country can slide back into the "good old days?" It would be tragic indeed, Mr. Speaker, if our provincial leaders once again wore their two solitudes blinkers. But even more distressing—more potentially disruptive and dangerous—would be realization by Canadians that some provinces are now coldly determined to renege on the pre-referendum constitutional reform consensus for purely partisan, regional or electoral interests.

As a Canadian who remains a convinced federalist and has a sincere faith in the basic integrity of his fellow citizens, I would like to believe that such is not the case. Let us take a look at the substance of the objections to the government's proposed machinery for bringing home our Constitution and its subsequent amendment by Canadians and for Canadians. First of all, much is being made of what is termed the government's "unilateral" action in pressing ahead with patriation without obtaining prior unanimous approval of every detail from the provinces.

We have been floundering over this issue for about half a century now and there is no reason to believe that, if we have to wait for total unanimity on every question, we will be any further ahead in another fifty years' time. Thus I strongly suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the notion of prior unanimity—not only in the constitutional area, but in any fallible, human organism—is an elusive and virtually unobtainable ideal. We have allowed this myth, this bugbear, to block and cripple all our previous attempts to give ourselves a constitution of our own. I sometimes wonder just what we must look like here in the eyes of the rest of the world. This must not be allowed to happen again. Now that we have the impetus, we have got to press ahead, or reconcile ourselves to the realization that we are not really the mature people we would like to believe.

But it has become increasingly clear over recent decades, Mr. Speaker, that if we wait for perfection, we will wait forever. Thus, we have no choice but to bite the bullet and act now, while the majority impetus remains the driving force. And all those raising academic arguments against what they see fit to deem "unilateral" action in this respect, might do

well to consider that the alternative to "now" is almost certainly "never".

This leads naturally to the second area of objection to the machinery—rather than the principle—of the government's patriation proposals: the amending formula. Recognition of the ever-present factor of human fallibility, of the virtual impossibility of total unanimity and of the need to avoid future constitutional stagnation, provides the basis for the proposed amending formula. But this has been carefully shaped to ensure that regional interests will remain forever protected from arbitrary constitutional change, effected by a simply majority of the country's population. Now this formula will clearly provide veto powers over certain areas of constitutional amendment for each of the country's four major regions. Again, it is a break of the futile ideal of unanimity, which past experience has shown all too painfully, would merely hamstring any future constitutional reform. Thus I submit that a formula along the lines proposed by our government has the dual advantage of providing for effective regional veto powers, while still permitting the people of this country to envisage realistically any constitutional reform clearly destined to enhance the over-all lifestyle of all Canadians.

On the question of the use of a referendum for popular ratification of any amending formula or subsequent constitutional change, I should make it clear that basic human rights must remain unaffected. This means that, as laid out in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, such provisions could never be withdrawn or altered merely by a referendum majority vote. Improvements, however, could always be made. That is, additional rights and freedoms could be added to the charter, in the light of experience and to meet needs not covered in the present proposals. Thus the charter would remain for all time inviolable, protecting our people, while itself protected from any threat from the transient "tyranny of the majority".

Before concluding, Mr. Speaker, I respectfully urge all members to reflect seriously, until we vote on the proposed constitutional resolution, upon the words of the outstanding parliamentarian Lord Acton, and I quote:

The maturity of a society is measured by the maturity with which this society treats its minorities—

In concluding, I appeal to the maturity of all members to get on with the work. Despite our differences and endless debates in certain areas of disagreement, I remain convinced that there is infinitely more to unite than to divide us. Our future, our potential in people and resources sometimes staggers the imagination. What we are striving for now is some sort of common denominator which can bring it all together for the common good.

● (1710)

[English]

Madam Speaker, if there is one thought which I would like to emphasize and to leave with you in concluding my remarks