

*The Constitution*

hon. members from our side who made a great contribution to that debate. I have a special commendation for the co-chairman of the committee, the hon. member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve (Mr. Joyal). I also commend other hon. members who have spoken on this topic.

I find this is a distressing time for me. I am compelled to comment upon the arrogance and single-minded actions of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) regarding the patriation of the Constitution. I feel it is necessary to draw attention to what surely will be the tragic consequences of these actions. I feel just as strongly that I must apologize to the residents of my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka and to millions of other Canadians. In fact, all of us in this House should apologize to Canadians everywhere who feel, as I do, that there are other more pressing problems facing this nation, such as inflation and unemployment. These are the matters we should be talking about and doing something about.

It is important that our Constitution be in Canada, but because the Prime Minister and members of his government have now arbitrarily placed this matter before us, we must challenge their approach and their methods. Surely we in Parliament have a very important responsibility, a responsibility to deal with those issues more urgently affecting the daily lives of the people of Canada.

A recent Gallup poll illustrates just how low on the level of priorities stands the issue we are now debating. Fifty-five per cent of those polled cited inflation as the most important problem facing the country today, and 15 per cent cited unemployment. Fewer than one in ten expressed concern over energy problems, national unity or problems connected with government.

● (1610)

Canadians want the Constitution brought home, I will admit that. However, another Gallup poll showed that 64 per cent are opposed to the government's unilateral position and high-handed decision to bring it home on the basis it has outlined. What they want now is for the government to get its priorities straight.

The Constitution is not going to feed a hungry family. It is not going to put a roof over the heads of people to keep them warm. It will not find or create jobs for anyone. It will not make us all one big happy family. The Constitution is important and can have an effect on living conditions, but let us not forget that we already have a Constitution and we still have inflation and unemployment. The Constitution is a declaration of principles. A proper application of those principles will put this country back on a sound and stable economic footing.

I would be much happier if we were now dealing with real problems rather than ones that have been created artificially. Regrettably, the constitutional debate is before us. I have some important points to bring forward in this regard. This is a fiery time in Canada's history. It is not a time for hasty or politically expedient decisions by any governmental body.

What we are discussing is not just an ordinary law. We are discussing the fundamental source of the law of the land, the

country's Constitution. Let there be no doubt about it, the outcome of this debate will have monumental consequences for the future of this country. We are talking about the future of Canadians for generations to come. We are talking about the survival of this country as a federal state.

What this government is attempting to do is wrong. I know it, the members on this side of the House know it, the Canadian people know it and the British know it. Everyone seems to know it except the Prime Minister and his puppets. I suspect that, if the truth were known, a good many of them also know it. Despite the fact that the majority of people on both sides of the Atlantic oppose the Prime Minister's constitutional plans, he is determined to have his own way. I am reminded of a song which the great entertainer Frank Sinatra made famous, and probably made a great deal of money from, entitled "I did it my way". That seems to be the theme song of the Prime Minister. The time has come for Canadians to stand up to the arrogance of this administration and to yell out loud and clear, "enough is enough!"

This government is uncaring, indifferent and ruthless. It is not worthy of the confidence of the Canadian people. Canadians deserve better. They deserve a government they can trust, a government willing to act in accordance with their wishes and concerns.

It is with respect for the wishes and concerns of Canadians that I say this resolution before us must be rejected. It must be rejected if we value the foundation upon which this country was created. We pride ourselves on being a secure, independent nation. Why, then, is the Prime Minister forcing the British Parliament into a corner, demanding that the British do something we should be doing ourselves? To place the British Parliament in such a position is an embarrassing and regrettable move. What should or should not be included in the Canadian Constitution is a matter for Canadians to determine, but only after the Constitution has been patriated, not before.

The government's constitutional package must be defeated for three very important reasons. The legality of the government's actions is highly questionable, the government's move to amend the Constitution unilaterally is a violation of the true meaning of federalism, and the government does not have the support of the majority of the Canadian population. These are three sound and solid reasons for the immediate and absolute rejection of this resolution. If the people do not want it done this way, if some of the provinces are taking the issue to the courts and if members of this Parliament oppose the move, why in heaven's name does the Prime Minister not back off?

The Premier of Saskatchewan has now bolted the government ranks. It has been said that Blakeney now makes the score eight to two against the Trudeau package. However, that should be ten to two because we must not forget the territories. This is certainly worth considering.

Never have we had a Prime Minister who has caused more divisiveness. When we look back we see some who were far from good, but this Prime Minister has put us on more of a collision course than all the other prime ministers combined. We have region against region, province against province,