

*The Address—Mr. Grafftey*

meeting with their counterparts in the various regions of this country. Task forces of appointed people are one thing, but in the best and truest sense of the word, constitutional documents are political documents.

In searching for an acceptable third option between status quo federalism and the separatist option of Mr. Lévesque, the Prime Minister must, without delay, establish an all-party parliamentary constitutional committee of this House of Commons. As I said in the other official language, it is my hope that our provincial counterparts will do the same thing. Also, it is my hope that during the first year after the establishment of such a committee we can meet with our provincial counterparts in provincial capitals from one end of this country to the other, and in the second year we will sit down and draft a modern constitution suited to modern times, made by Canadians for Canadians here in Canada. The whole operation will be more than just symbolism. It will create the cement in which we can get this union back on the road. It will not be easy. It will require statesmanship, hard work, guts and imagination. But the time to get going is now; we cannot tolerate further delay.

I appeal to the Prime Minister, and I say this perhaps advisedly, who at times has not shown too much respect for the pith and substance, the centrifugal aspects of the elective system, to let the elected representatives of the people in on the constitutional debate, if he wants to have that kind of profound and all-embracing consensus which will bring this country together. It is obvious that with the representation on his side of the House from the province of Quebec, and with our representation this side of the House largely from western Canada, it is important to inject this note of bipartisanship into such an important debate.

● (1442)

I heard the Prime Minister suggest a federal referendum. Quite frankly, I have not consulted other members of my party on this, but it is my reaction—and in this debate we are talking as Canadians, rather than as party people—that we should be very careful with that federal referendum. We must be very careful that we are not playing Lévesque's game. Possibly no province has the unilateral right to separate, and if we admit the principle that referendums can divide and bring this country to an end—which I do not admit—we are falling into a trap.

So I say to the Prime Minister, go very easy on admitting the validity of any referendum, be it provincial or federal, in this whole national unity debate. It is no idle threat when I say that for many Canadians, particularly in my part of the world, separation will become an increasingly viable option and those who defend the federal status quo continue to support separation blindly.

I have thought about this for a long, long time. I know that national unity is indivisible, but I think it is true to say that those of us who live in my part of the world are living with this thing day by day. Frankly, I myself am not satisfied with status quo federalism, and for many reasons. In my view,

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much more is involved than language, culture and the so-called Quebec question. Ottawa no longer responds to legitimate regional needs from coast to coast. After 1958 and during my first year in Ottawa, I was appalled at the waste, duplication and buck-passing which went on between different levels of government. Action on gut economic and social issues was, and is, being shelved because of the irresponsible handling of these issues within an outmoded constitutional framework.

As examples, I think of housing, the humane delivery of medical and health care services, urban renewal, public transit, job creation, and the rest. How can I tell my constituents, be they French or English-speaking, that contemporary federalism is working, when in many instances in their home towns they are faced with staggering unemployment rates of well over 18 per cent and galloping inflation of well over 10 per cent?

Far too many federalists who are defending the status quo feel that the provinces can be strong only at the expense of a strong federal authority. I have never understood this argument. Perhaps it is true within the present constitutional framework that needs immediate changing, but I do not believe it would be the case under a new, modern constitution drafted within the next two years, made in Canada by Canadians and for Canadians right here. Modern constitutional objectives should underline and encourage strong federal and provincial powers within their respective jurisdictions. Can we expect less? If I have oversimplified the issue, I would like to hear from individual members in this debate before it is too late. I repeat, can we expect less? In view of the present situation, where we have escalation of confrontation between the Prime Minister of Canada and a provincial premier from my province, can we have a continuation of this debate, confrontation and escalation while the economy goes down the drain? I say no, and the time for action is now.

When we analyse federalism in other parts of the world, sometimes we erroneously attempt to make analogies and comparisons, but one which is close at hand historically and geographically has some pertinent relevance. In the United States, after the Declaration of Independence was signed, the first constitutional document was the Articles of Confederation. It proved too weak to hold the union together and a big second step had to be taken before the present constitution was finally drafted and became operative in Washington.

In 1867, the Fathers of Confederation were all elected public officials. There was no task force of defeated members of parliament or of retired premiers. There was no task force going from coast to coast without any elective responsibility to the people. The Fathers of Confederation were elected public officials back in 1867, but it was impossible for them to envisage all the changes which would take place within the next 110 years. Unfortunately for many status quo federalists, the fear of change causes them to resort to irrational words in defence of the status quo, and thus confrontation and escalation, while the country becomes more and more divided and the economy becomes more and more paralysed.