

MP fears cultural straitjacket

Because of the importance to Canadians of the issues concerning the Constitution of Canada, I am enclosing for your information a copy of my Letter of Resignation from the Federal Cabinet addressed to the Prime Minister.
The Letter may be used or

reprinted in any way that you believe will be appropriate. Also, I would welcome receiving any comments that you might have on this subject which I believe is vital to the future of Canada.

James Richardson
Member of Parliament
Winnipeg South

Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau
C.M.P.
Prime Minister:

It has become increasingly apparent that you and I do not share the same vision of Canada, and we both love

On Thursday evening, Oct. 7, I told you that I wished to resign from the Cabinet and I explained, for more than an hour long conversation, my valid reason for wishing to do so.

On Friday morning, Oct. 8, in your office, I reconfirmed my wish to resign and I offered you a letter of resignation.

On both occasions you urged me to reconsider my decision and at the Friday morning meeting you refused to accept, or even to read, my letter of resignation.

Because my reason for resigning is one of principle and because the issue on which I am resigning is vital to the future of Canada, I am, once again, after carefully considering your objections, presenting you with my resignation from the Cabinet. This resignation is effective immediately and I will announce it without delay.

I believe it is important that Canadians everywhere be made aware of the far-reaching implications for Canada continued some of the proposals concerning the Constitution that will be considered at the forthcoming Conference of First Ministers. For that reason it is urgent that I obtain freedom to speak openly and publicly without the constraints imposed by my position in the Cabinet.

Although I believe that we should bring the Canadian Constitution to Canada, I want to speak about the danger to Canada's future that I see in some of the proposed additions to the Constitution at the time of patriation, and about my strong opposition to the "single-province" veto in the amending procedure that has been proposed.

I believe it is wrong for two

provinces, Ontario and Quebec, to each be given a perpetual veto over changes in the Canadian Constitution when other provinces do not have a veto.

This is the most obvious kind of discrimination, because it creates, for all time, two classes of provinces — "first-class" provinces that have a veto, and "second-class" provinces that do not have a veto. How can we say that we believe in equality when two provinces are to have a veto in perpetuity, regardless of the size of their population in the future, relative to the other provinces?

More specifically, I believe that it is wrong and very dangerous for Canada's future to give Quebec, the province that is primarily interested in French language rights, a perpetual veto over any future amendments to the Constitution concerning language rights. This is particularly true if new and additional language rights are put into the Constitution at the time of patriation as was proposed at the Victoria Conference.

It is important above all else that twenty-five years from now, or fifty years from now, or in fact, in all future years, that Canadians be able to determine the fundamental nature of their country. I can not remain silent when changes to the Constitution are being considered that could tie the hands of future generations of Canadians for all time. What I wish to prevent is a rigid amending procedure that gives a "single province" veto over Constitutional change.

As you know, no other successful federal state in the world gives any one of its provinces, or cantons, or states, the same power to approve or disapprove changes in the constitution as is given to the nation itself.

I believe we must establish as a fundamental principle of Canada's nationhood that no single province should have the right to approve or to disapprove an amendment to the Canadian

Constitution that is equal to the right of the Federal Parliament to approve or disapprove.

If Canada is to be able to grow and develop in a changing world, it is important that Canadians be able to amend their Constitution on a nation-wide, or national, basis by the agreement of a majority of provinces and by agreement of a majority of people. To be a great nation we can not be restrained or restricted by the veto of any single province.

It is evident that Canadians will be put into a linguistic and cultural "straight-jacket" if they agree to additional language rights in the patriated Constitution and, at the same time, provide a perpetual veto to Quebec, the one province that has a special interest in French language rights.

Because of the very real difficulties and divisiveness that have been encountered in the Bilingual program in the public service, in the Armed Forces, and elsewhere, it seems to me that most Canadians would consider it prudent to continue for some time longer with the bilingual experiment before agreeing to entrench increased language rights, for all time, in the Constitution.

At the time of the Victoria Conference in 1971 no one knew how the implementation of the Official Languages Act was going to work. We have had five years since Victoria to observe the results of implementing this legislation and it is now apparent that the Government's bilingual program has encountered increasing difficulties with each passing year.

Despite these difficulties, I agree with the necessity of continuing to experiment with the concept of bilingualism until we find workable and acceptable policies. But I totally disagree with locking bilingualism into the Constitution before the Government's bilingual policies have proved to be workable and acceptable.

My central argument is not whether bilingualism is right or wrong for Canada. The answer to that vital question should be determined by Canadians in a democratic and tolerant way as years go by, and as bilingualism proves its merit, or disproves its worth, as a Canadian ideal.

My central argument is that the decision concerning whether bilingualism is right or wrong for Canada should not be made

NOW, for all time, by the combined acts of entrenching escalated French language rights in the Constitution and, AT THE SAME TIME, giving the province with the greatest vested interest in French language rights a perpetual veto over any future change or amendment.

If we allow ourselves to make this serious mistake, we will have denied future generations of Canadians the right to consider not only the language question, but other vital matters of national interest, in the light of current circumstances.

To do this would mean deciding now, for future generations of Canadians, what kind of country they are to live in, and it would be depriving them of the right to change the nature of their country regardless of the National, North American, or World circumstances that may prevail in the future.

For emphasis, I wish to repeat that I have one objective — one sensible and reasonable request. My request to you and to the Premiers of the Provinces and to the Canadian public is this:

Do not try to entrench additional language rights in the Constitution of Canada under a Quebec veto, at least until Canada has developed bilingual policies that have proved to be workable and acceptable.

You have said recently that most of us are in public life because of our convictions about our country and that we are not here in Ottawa just to manage our departments. I fully share that conviction with you.

Although I have welcomed the opportunity to work with the Canadian Armed Forces as Minister of National Defence for the past four years and will leave them stronger than when I took over, I did not come to Ottawa primarily to run the Department of National Defence or any other department of government. I came to Ottawa because I believed in Canada's destiny and I wanted to participate in the achievement of Canada's full potential as a united and prosperous nation.

It is eight years ago this spring that I declared my interest in entering public life and I was nominated as the Liberal candidate for Winnipeg South on May 15, 1968. It had been my intention, subject to the wishes of the electorate, to stay in public life for ten years.

It is now clear to me that if,

between now and the next election, I am free to speak about the Canadian Constitution without the constraints of a Cabinet position, I will be able to do more to achieve the kind of Canada in which I believe than I could do by remaining as a Member of the Cabinet.

Although my main reason for resigning is to oppose the entrenching of French language rights in the Constitution under a Quebec veto, at least until Canada has developed bilingual policies that are workable and acceptable, I have other differences with the Government. I have often been disappointed and also annoyed by the Government's apparent indifference towards what I consider to be the reasonable aspirations of Western Canada.

Also, I do not believe that the Government has fully recognized and utilized for the common good, the energies and creativity of Canadian entrepreneurs. The Bureaucracy is still too big and Government is still interfering too much in the working of the economy.

My differences with you and the Government on these two matters have not, of themselves, ever been great enough to cause my resignation, but along with my primary concern about entrenching language rights in the Constitution, they have been contributing factors in my decision.

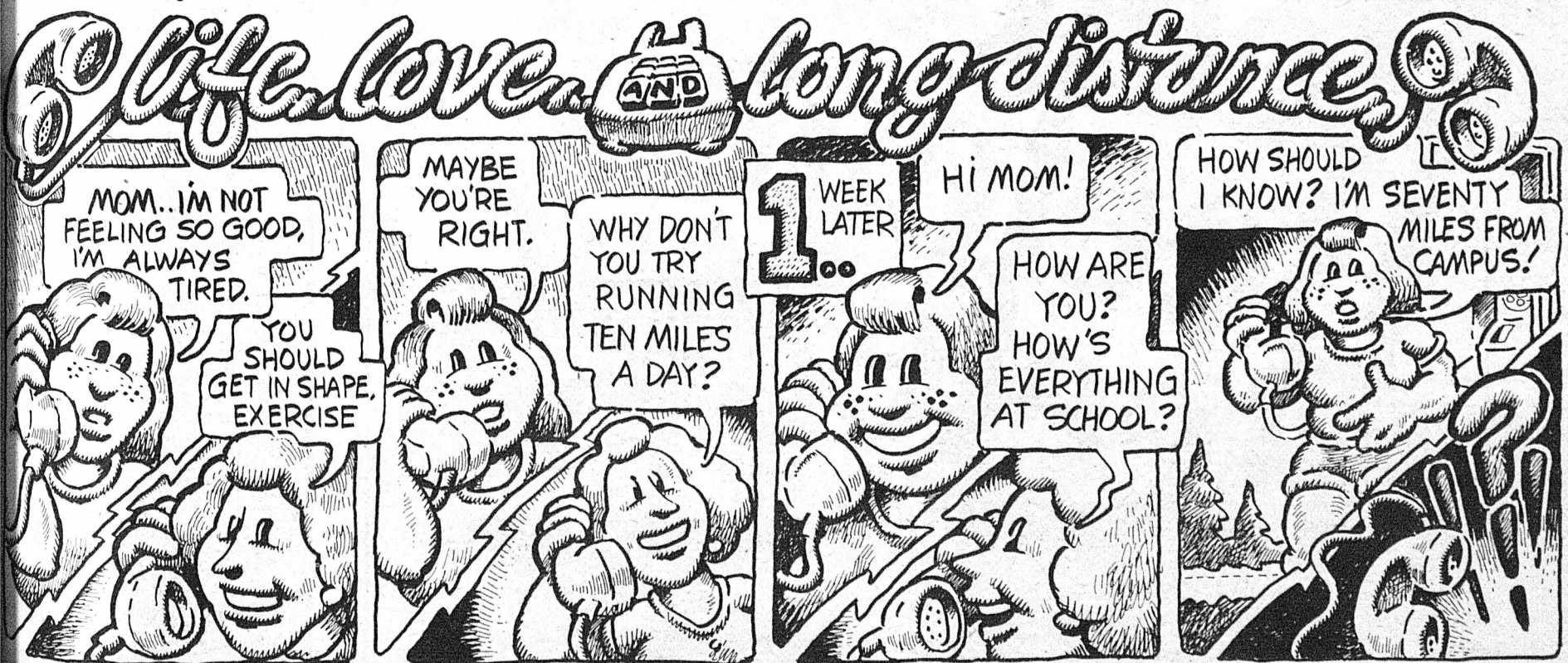
This may not be the right time for personal reflections, but I do not want to leave after more than eight years of close association as a Member of your Government without expressing my great admiration for many aspects of your leadership. Throughout all my terms of office I have, along with your other Colleagues, held you in the highest regard, and I will continue to do so. I know that my sense of personal friendship can not diminish.

As we both continue to work for the kind of Canada in which we believe, we might reflect on the words of Walt Whitman, which are quoted in the novel *Disputed Passage*:

"Have you learned lessons only of those who admired you, and were tender with you, and stood aside for you?"

"Have you not learned great lessons from those who braced themselves against you and disputed the passage with you?"

James Richardson



Share the Long Distance feeling with someone you love. Trans-Canada Telephone System