

The Constitution

federalist or independentist, I shall unfortunately have to oppose it in the forthcoming vote.

Mr. Speaker, when I reflect deeply on the implications of this proposed resolution for the future of Quebec and of Canadian federalism, I cannot help thinking that the constitutional status quo before the referendum was not so bad after all.

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I want to commend the hon. member for Montmorency, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Duclos) for his very fine and eloquent speech. I was most impressed with his frankness, sincerity, the depth of his feeling and indeed the courage with which he placed on the record his genuine feeling about this constitutional package.

He identified a number of serious flaws. I must say it was most refreshing for a man of his stature to stand in this House of Commons, and I am sure it was not easy for him, and speak with such deep feeling.

I want to say as well that I found his approach very reasonable. I think it is fair to say that many of us on this side share some of the feelings he expressed in his comments today. He not only pointed out some of the deficiencies and inadequacies in the resolution before us, but coupled it with a number of constructive suggestions which I hope his leader and members of his caucus will seriously consider. In many respects some of the reservations he has expressed here tonight are reservations which we in this party share.

● (2010)

I suspect there are a number of Canadians and, indeed, some members of this House who are torn sometimes between a compelling obligation on the one hand to get involved in this debate and an obvious reservation on the other over the fact that there is a perception that this constitutional debate has gone on too long. Many Canadians are undoubtedly becoming weary and bored with what appears to be an endless constitutional debate. I am sure there are a number of Canadians who are saying: whatever it is, let us get it over with, let us pass it and go on to some of the more important issues before us such as the economy, energy, jobs, transportation and agricultural matters.

I suspect it is fair to say, in talking to people in my constituency and across the land, that the Constitution is not all that appealing, at least to the vast majority of Canadians, nor is it considered a priority item.

Regardless of whether it is boring and somewhat incomprehensible to many Canadians and whether or not it should be of major priority, we have this resolution before us with which we have to deal. We have a responsibility and an obligation as members of this House to attempt to explain the contents of this resolution to Canadians. Our duty on this side is, of course, to draw attention to some of the weaknesses and try to

warn about imminent dangers as a result of the passage of this package.

I must say—and I am sure you will share this view—there have been some excellent speeches. This has been an excellent debate. There has been a tremendous amount of work put into the speeches made in this House of Commons, and it is important that we consider them.

The importance of this measure has to be considered in the context that it will form the basic ground rules by which our country is to be governed economically, politically, culturally and socially. It also should be borne in mind that constitutions do not operate by themselves; they require people and institutions in order to work. Therefore, it requires a maximum amount of participation in the formulation of this basic structure, in addition to an eminent amount of good will, understanding and a solid commitment of the vast majority of Canadians, if the proposal is to work and provide that structural framework wherein our country can move ahead and function in a climate of harmony and fulfilment.

What I find most unfortunate and, indeed, disappointing is that this particular proposal is dividing our country as never before. The divisive and embittered environment within which this debate is being carried out is a result of the confrontational tactics of this government. This has been brought about by the sleazy strategy outlined in that infamous leak of a cabinet document prior to the introduction of the resolution. This has been caused by lack of candour, and I refer here specifically to the exchange in this House about the government's relationship with representatives of the British government. This unfortunate situation is the result of unilateralism, to which the hon. member who just resumed his seat referred as well, and the result of ignoring the wishes of the provinces.

Thrown in with this proposal is a very discriminatory energy program which is the most destructive policy ever perpetrated on an industry in this country. This government—and this as well has been alluded to by the parliamentary secretary—did not receive a mandate for constitutional reform at the last election, just as it did not receive a mandate to take over the pricing of oil. That is a provincial responsibility and, indeed, it has been worked out in the past through federal and provincial co-operation. Nor did this government have a mandate to confiscate or nationalize, as is proposed, and as is being done, under the National Energy Program.

One finds it passing strange that a resolution, ostensibly designed to renew our federation, should be greeted with such concern. A resolution, if it was going to renew our federation and provide that new impetus for renewed nation building, should be received with joy, enthusiasm, excitement and great expectation. It should be a cause for celebration. It should be a mechanism which is seen and perceived as one that will unite rather than divide us.

I submit, as I did earlier, that this proposal is dividing our nation. That division, I submit, will continue if the proposal is passed and it will cause irreparable harm to our country. This proposal is challenged by more than half of our federation. Some eight provinces are now opposed, with more than two