

*The Constitution*

We believe in a strong central government, but not in principle; we believe in it because it will be absolutely necessary in the years ahead to patriate our economy and to develop the industrial strategy necessary for saving the Canadian economy from de-industrialization and stagnation. A strong role for the federal government will be required in fields such as health care in order to guarantee quality of life to Canadians in poorer provinces. The importance of the federal government's role in the redistribution of wealth must be emphasized, while admitting that until now the job that the federal government has done in this area is poor indeed. In fact, the poor are still poor and the rich are richer.

As I say, Mr. Speaker, we are in favour of equalization in ways that even the government is not. But we are concerned that equalization, as spelled out in the proposal, is too vague. It does not guarantee that equalization will be between governments as opposed to pay-outs to people or corporations in areas deemed to be in need. The hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) elaborated on this point just the other day. This party will be offering appropriate amendments in an attempt to improve this part of the proposal when the committee finally meets.

We are in favour of an amending formula. I think all hon. members would agree that it would be quite useless to bring the constitution home without being able to do anything with it when we get it here. We do, however, have some very serious concerns about section 42 where it appears that too much power is being given to the federal government to resolve future constitutional stalemates. Surely it is pessimistic to write in such scenarios, and as I cannot imagine that the details of this section are crucial to the government's vision of the future, we therefore, expect openness to amendments in this area. Unilateral action may be necessary once, but to write in the ability of a future Parliament to act similarly, albeit accompanied by a referendum the terms of which need to be improved, seems unnecessary. This weakens the claim that this is just a package for the people and does not alter federal-provincial relations.

● (1800)

And so we find ourselves in favour, in principle, of the major thrusts of the government's proposals. We will no doubt be suggesting improvements in detail through amendments suggested by our representatives on the joint committee. The government not only should but needs to be open to such amendments if it is truly interested in nation-building.

In this context I wish to reinforce what my leader has already said about our demand that an amendment reinforcing and clarifying provincial ownership and control of resources be accepted in order for us to be able to support the entire constitutional package. This is because we believe that in order for this constitutional watershed to be a positive one and not a negative one, the felt priorities of western Canada must be addressed. It is true there are many other things left to work on, from the Supreme Court to the Senate to family law to communications, and so on. This, we hope to God, is not the

final constitutional word. There is plenty of work to be done after patriation. Much remains to be done, for instance, in terms of guaranteeing the rights of women, of native people and of the handicapped. We will be offering amendments in these areas as well and we trust the government will be open to these very important areas of concern. Perhaps some changes might even be made before the constitution is patriated. But if this is to be a constructive word in our constitutional history and not a destructive word, then the government must move on the critical issue of reinforcing and clarifying provincial ownership and control of resources, something, as I understand it, it already agreed to once before on the opening day of the most recent constitutional conference.

The government makes much of the claim that action must be taken if the promises made to Quebeckers in the referendum campaign are to be fulfilled. But many of those who went to Quebec to argue for the No vote said that they, too, wished constitutional change. To make only those changes which are perceived by the government to fulfil its promises to Quebec is to betray the understanding which many Canadians had when they encouraged their fellow Canadians in Quebec to hang in there and work for change together. Our amendment pertaining to resource ownership will significantly redress this imbalance and we trust the government will accept it.

Mention of the referendum campaign in Quebec brings me to my final point, which is the claim that this proposal is the answer, that this proposal is the needed response to the crisis posed by the substantial support for sovereignty association shown in Quebec. I want to suggest that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is far too selfconfident about the ability of his vision, however noble, to fulfil the aspirations of those who voted Yes in the referendum, or indeed to fulfil the aspirations of those who voted No. His is a classically Liberal view of reality—and I use "liberal" in the small "l" sense—with individual French Canadians making their way in the context of equality of opportunity and official bilingualism anywhere in Canada. This is his vision. He has had it for some time and it appears it will be fulfilled before he retires. It is a goal which, I admit, rights old wrongs. If it is accepted by the Canadian people it will strengthen federalism and the distinctiveness of Canada on the North American continent. But it is a vision that does not answer new questions or new problems.

All over the world—and here I can speak about Quebec as a non-Quebecker, because what I am talking about is not just happening in Quebec—people are asking themselves what they can do together as a group, as a people, as a community. Many people are weary of the world in which we are all just individuals. This new sense of community, or the desire for it, seems to be beyond the ken of the Prime Minister and indeed beyond the ken of the Liberal party. All group thinking is mere tribalism and regression. Nationalism is bad, it is just another ghost of Duplessis. For a man with a reputation as an intellectual, the Prime Minister displays an amazing lack of insight in this issue. It's as though he stopped thinking about 20 years ago.