

*The Constitution*

grant rights to the Canadian people. As a matter of fact, this act has required the Canadian government to provide all Canadian citizens with government services in one of the official languages, either in French or in English. And that is also a sign or symbol of national unity. We still have, however, a step to take, that is to give ourselves a constitution made by Canadians for Canadians. The proposed resolution for the patriation of the British North America Act which is now before the House includes an amending formula, a charter of basic rights and freedoms, minority language rights as well as the entrenchment of the principle of equalization so as to ensure the sharing of the Canadian wealth.

It is quite clear that we should have our own Constitution in Canada; all Members of Parliament agree on that. However, we do not agree on its provisions and the procedure, and I should like to deal with this, Mr. Speaker. The proposed amending formula would require the 11 governments of Canada to agree to any amendment to the Canadian Constitution within two years after patriation. During this two-year period, these same governments would have to meet and try to agree on an amending formula which would be satisfactory to all of them. If, after two years, the federal and provincial governments have failed to agree on an appropriate formula, the Canadian people would be consulted by means of a referendum. A formula agreed on by all provinces would be submitted to the Canadian people, as well as the formula being proposed now by the Canadian government, whereby all amendments to the Constitution would require the consent of two Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario, and two western provinces, as well as 50 per cent of the population.

● (1620)

The proposed resolution also includes a Canadian charter of rights and fundamental freedoms. We all know that Canada and certain provinces now have a charter of rights and freedoms, but we know as well, and many speakers before me have said so, that the rights and freedoms of Canadians were trampled on various occasions in this country and many of our fellow citizens have suffered serious prejudices at times.

As to the protection of the linguistic rights of Canada's French and English minorities, for the first time we agree in one specific field: French education will be available to French minorities outside the province of Quebec, and the English minority residing in Quebec will continue to get the same services. In other words, all Canadians throughout the country, whether their mother tongue is French or English, will enjoy the same rights and their own language and culture will be respected.

It is true that the decision to guarantee such services to linguistic minorities will have to depend on numbers, but I think we must have confidence in the good faith of the leaders we elect and, should the need arise, the citizens who believe that their rights were violated will have their day in court

where judges will rule on legislative measures and actions taken by the provincial administrations. And finally the proposed constitution is aimed at sanctioning the principle of wealth sharing, namely equalization. Let us recall that not so very long ago certain regions of Canada were facing enormous difficulties and they were generously assisted by other regions of Canada which today find themselves in a precarious position.

Before equalization came into being the Government of Canada took steps to help the provincial governments. Among other things let us mention only the advent of medicare in 1966. As the Minister of Labour (Mr. Regan) said, this proposal on the part of the Canadian government was intended to help provincial authorities throughout Canada offer all citizens the same health services regardless of their financial situation. And even on such an important subject, on something which is so necessary to the welfare of Canadians, it was not easy to reach agreement and we had to wait until 1972 to see all provinces at last join this insurance plan.

If I thought it was necessary to mention the Canadian health insurance plan for which the federal government pays half the costs and which is administered by the provincial governments, and to refer to the equalization payments which are also made directly to those same provincial governments by the federal government and which began after so many years of discussions, it is to emphasize that federal-provincial negotiations are never easy even if the two levels of government say they want to work in the best interests of Canadians. Now what about the decades of discussions whose avowed purpose was to secure a Canadian constitution but which led to a deadlock as a result of local interests and delays?

Should we continue the debates with the illusion that we will achieve unanimous agreement in that field? Mr. Speaker, the year 2000 will soon be upon us and when our children read the history of Canada will they understand our hesitations, even our weakness, in our quest for a solution to that national problem and our will to solve it?

Will they understand that each and every time a Liberal government proposed needed and saving measures for Canadians, the official Progressive Conservative opposition rejected them? In the past, when the time came to give ourselves symbols, reasons to be proud of ourselves as Canadians, for instance, the Canadian citizenship and the maple leaf flag, the official opposition resisted them. Today, after having made every effort to come to an agreement with the provincial governments to have our very own Canadian constitution, which efforts came to naught because the provincial governments think they can better protect the rights and freedoms of Canadians by opposing the proposal, it takes the Liberal government considerable courage—which is nothing new—to go ahead and act, Mr. Speaker. The great pages in Canadian history were written by Liberal governments, led by men of duty and great generosity. Might it be that because of the