

*Proceedings on Adjournment Motion*

I am grateful for the opportunity to explain my reasons for suggesting that it is an urgent matter and one of vital importance to the future of Canada and of parliament. For a long time the various members of this house have indicated their view as to the need for such a committee. Only recently the Prime Minister indicated that the matter was under consideration.

The other night, on June 21, the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister gave what seemed to be a dusty answer to a similar question put by the hon. member for Sherbrooke (Mr. Allard)—an answer which, if it were taken seriously, would not only imply that no constitutional committee would ever be appointed, but indeed that there was no point in appointing any committee of this house. Fortunately the Prime Minister indicated on June 23 that the government view went no further than to consider it was not desirable to set up a committee on the constitution at this time—I quote the words of the Prime Minister.

I concede the government may well be entitled to consider the appropriate timing of the appointment of such an important committee. Undoubtedly there are reasons why the government does not desire to appoint such a committee at this particular moment, for example the fact that various royal commissions whose reports may touch on constitutional issues are due to report soon.

I wish to present the reasons of urgency for dealing with this matter soon. The Prime Minister speaking in the Throne Speech debate in January, spoke of the need for new frameworks within which each region of Canada can develop according to its own particular requirement as part of a strong, united country. The interim report of the B and B Commission has referred to the present situation in Canada as the gravest crisis in our history. Quite recently the province of Quebec had an election, and its new prime minister is an expert constitutional lawyer. Perhaps I should not say that in the presence of the parliamentary secretary, because constitutional lawyers seldom recognize the expertise of others in the field.

However, Mr. Daniel Johnson in his recent book "Egalite ou Independance" put forcefully the need for constitutional change if confederation is to be maintained. In it he made a number of suggestions, some of which were rather drastic, but at least he made it

clear that the question of constitutional change cannot be bypassed, put off and ignored indefinitely.

I am alarmed at the prospect that at coming interprovincial conferences the government of Canada will be confronted with constitutional demands and that piecemeal concessions may be made and confederation undermined. It is vital that the government be supported by the informed opinion of members of this house from all parties and all regions of Canada. Consideration of the constitutional future of Canada is not a partisan matter or the property of any party, not even of the government party of the moment.

One last reason for urgency is that any such committee will require ample time for hearing experts and studying the problems involved in detail. If we are to take advantage of the spirit of our centenary, we must use the hundredth year of Canada's existence to reaffirm our national unity by making the constitution of Canada a Canadian document appropriate to the second half of the twentieth century. This will require a creative and constructive effort by the parliament of Canada. An all-party committee can be an important instrument in that process.

**Mr. P.-E. Trudeau (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister):** For some time now, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin) has been a firm and earnest proponent of this kind of parliamentary committee to examine the constitution, and I was hoping tonight he would show some good constructive reason why this committee should be established. I am afraid he has not done so.

Surely if such a committee were to be of some service it would have to establish a consensus among Canadian parliamentarians as to what kind of constitution we want, and I do not think the hon. member has shown that this kind of committee would be of any use in bringing ideologically closer together members of this house, some of whom believe in federalism, some of whom believe in special statuses for provinces, and some of whom believe that all forms of direct taxation should be given over to the provinces. I do not think that this kind of committee would create this kind of consensus. It would merely be a forum in which the constitution would be turned into some kind of political football and become the subject of partisan debate.