

Even now, with an eye to electoral advantage, a devious piece of legislation, tens of thousands of government employees and hundreds of millions of dollars are being marshalled to spread the illusion of a constitutional agreement that does not really exist.

The referendum is founded upon a document that few, even of those inside government, have read or are likely to read. Though ministers speak of it and the media through habit have come to call it "an agreement" or "an entente", it is officially entitled "a consensus report", and that is really what it is: at most, largely an agreement to work out an agreement. Upon close examination there is not yet that much substance, nor that much consensus to it. To refer to it in reverential tones as "an agreement" or "an entente" is boasting of a manly prowess that is not really there. It is, in my view, premature to talk of who won this or who gained that. There is as yet much to come.

The document itself recognizes that the consensus it reports is far from complete. Had it been regarded as complete, federal and provincial ministers would have signed it as they have signed others on similar occasions in the past. It is not signed. It is nowhere near ready to be signed.

If it were complete, it would not have to acknowledge—as it does—that "dissents . . . are not recorded in this summary document."

If it were complete, then federal and provincial ministers would not have had to resort to the use of the contrivance of "a political accord", as they do 24 times, to accommodate the inability to cast their agreement in legally binding language. Nor would they have had to note the 16 or 17 political accords that are nothing more than agreements to someday agree. Nor would the document record that ministers have decided not to pursue 14 major issues and to leave six others unresolved for the time being.

The test of this basis for a referendum should, of course, be in examining the legal texts. Senator Murray has said that we are unlikely to see these texts before the referendum. Mr. Clark scoffs at the idea that anyone other than the lawyers would want to see them at all. But there are very few Canadians who will want to trust the government in this regard. The fact is that, even where there is agreement in principle, a critical amount of the detail is still missing and, obviously, the detail could make the principles meaningless.

There is no reason to believe that the government will take the sanctity of the law any more seriously than it takes the role of members of Parliament. Members got the consensus report the day before this debate began. The government will be just as cavalier in dealing with other uncertainties—and there are many uncertainties. For example, where further political consultation is required, and a lot is, we do not know whether the

[Senator Pitfield.]

government will call for further federal-provincial meetings—of ministers or officials—or what will happen after the referendum, presuming the "yes" vote wins?

● (1540)

We do not know whether the package must be accepted and dealt with as a whole or whether it can be trotted out for enactment piecemeal and who is to decide how to proceed.

One could go on and on. The fact is that there is so much uncertainty that one cannot but suspect that either parliamentarians, and the Canadian people with us, are pawns in what is basically a con job or that ministers are floundering, fighting for time, and winging it as they go.

How have we come to this pass? The answer is that Canadians are so fed up with constitutional demands and threats that they are prepared to do almost anything, to believe almost anything, in order to get the constitution out of the way, in order to get on with resolving the economic problems which the country faces and which are more real and certainly more immediate.

Politicians have been arguing over the Constitution for so long and with such sorry results that everybody wants the debate to end. Many people do not care for the moment at what cost. The fear and frustration of the present situation has engendered an attitude of indifference to the accuracy of what is said and the cost of what is promised. The attitude is one of, "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead."

It is in the context of this fatigue, this exasperation, of overwhelming impatience and the mood of virtual irresponsibility that goes with it, that appeals for vengeance upon Canada's enemies can be made and other forms of intimidation can be practised. Then ministers can be freed from being called into account when it is said that there is this wonderful package of reforms, that the proposed referendum will put an end to constitutional demands and the threats of separation.

The credibility and integrity of our institutions of government, which are the foundations of our democracy, demand that our people know that the referendum is not going to end the constitutional battle, that the consensus report will inevitably whet many appetites for more. As Premier Bourassa said last week, "We've only just begun. The debate will not end with the referendum."

Those who have hopes of peace and certainty settling over the land and financial stability creeping back into the markets would do well to face up to reality.

The Prime Minister and Mr. Clark are dashing around speaking of this "entente" when there is no entente, this "package" where there is no package, this "renewal" when there is no renewal. Business and opinion leaders call people to hold their nose and vote. Simply urging people to be realistic is to invite recrimination. For the moment it is "in", if not quite to cast about pointing the evil finger at the enemies of Canada, at least to talk melliflously of how the referendum is