

THE CONSTITUTION AND RIGHTS OF MINORITIES

The Constitution and its patriation stimulated great debate. That debate is now over but we are pursuing continued discussions on its meaning and application. I welcome this for it is important that there be full discussion on this document and that we all contribute to its growth and development. Patriation was essentially a mechanical process and as Canadians we have a responsibility to continue to shape this document to best suit our needs. I feel certain you have a keen interest in this process and I hope a desire to participate.

The theme chosen for today narrows in on the rights of minorities. Throughout the debate on the Constitution there was much interest and attention focussed on this particular aspect.

It is not so narrow a theme as might be imagined. My colleagues on both sides of the House were capable of giving it very broad attention. I hope you don't expect me to list all the possible minorities - it might be rather like reciting the telephone book, so diverse and numerous are the possibilities.

But a few examples might illustrate this - linguistic, ethnic, national or racial are some broadly defined minorities. Physically handicapped or physically gifted are other categories. Religious or social minorities can be identified, as can economic or cultural.

Within each of these broad categories are subgroups of other minorities - and then there are cross cultural or combinations of minorities which form other groupings within the matrix. It is, when you come down to it, the very fabric of the patchwork quilt, an expression which has been used to describe this great nation.

As a modest caveat to this fragmented description of Canada, I would urge you and all Canadians to think first and foremost of a united Canada, a prosperous Canada made that way by all Canadians whatever their colour, religion, language or national background. I would urge you to look on the Constitution as safeguarding the rights and privileges of all of us as Canadians not as units or elements separate unto ourselves. We sometimes lose sight of the whole by focussing too closely or intently on details.