

Dominion-Provincial Conference

properly because the present constitution is either silent or vague about the level of government which has the legal competence to tackle them. Until the constitution is brought into the 20th century in some of these respects, governments are to a large degree powerless to solve the problems either by acting alone or in co-operation with other levels of government. These are current difficulties which face Canadians and are spawned by this technological age; they could not have been foreseen 100 years ago.

Many of the subjects that we discussed, such as the spending power, which perhaps seemed theoretical to many, are at the heart of all these questions. We are very often asked, as a government, to do something about a problem that is not under federal jurisdiction. We are very often asked by some to do something which can only be done through the use of the spending power, and then we are told by others that the spending power should not be used. So it is important to clarify these issues. The examples I have given are only a few of the many reasons why there is a great, pressing need for this constitutional task to be moved forward.

Another of the reasons, and perhaps more important still, is the temper of the youth of this country. There are in Canada today more than ten million persons below the age of 25. These young people are not content to permit the future of Canada to be fettered in any fashion by the failure of governments to proceed promptly and adequately with these various tasks and with the constitutional task which lies at the bottom of any action. Forty-nine per cent of the population of Canada will not accept a relaxed and casual attitude toward these preparations for our second century.

I trust that by saying this I shall not be accused of injecting an unnecessary note of alarm or crisis or panic into an otherwise contented country. I simply say that there is an urgent need for continuing progress, that we would be misleading ourselves if we did not recognize the mood of the country. We would be misleading ourselves as well if we assumed that we are now past the most difficult part of these discussions. The most difficult parts are still to come. We the government realize it very much, and we hope that the opposition will come forward with concrete proposals which will help us in our task.

Notwithstanding these caveats, I wish to say how pleased I am with the progress made at the session of the conference which was held this week. I wish to say as well that I

anticipate continued progress and at an acceptable pace. We are already setting in motion provisions for a meeting of the continuing committee of officials early in April. If there is agreement between the federal and provincial representatives of that continuing committee, I am sure we will be able to go on to the third stage of our conference in a very short period of time.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, after tabling this document which manifests the points of consensus achieved at the Constitutional Conference, I express publicly the indebtedness of the government to the officials and members of the public service of Canada who have contributed so much to this process of constitutional review. Their skillful assistance has permitted the Continuing Committee and the Conference Secretariat to contribute an immense amount of valuable and accurate material for ministerial decisions. I am sure that all members of this house join me in offering thanks to them.

[English]

The conference on the constitution is a continuing and established fact. In a period of just over 12 months it has met twice and it gives, as I said a moment ago in French, promise that it will meet more frequently in the future. Canadians will be the better for it.

Having made these general remarks, Mr. Speaker, I would prefer to sit down and listen to the opposition. Indeed, I am quite anxious to hear the opposition spokesmen on this very important subject. I hope they will not take all their time trotting out the usual clichés about failure and about zero performance. I hope they will not say on the one hand that we have been too rigid and unbending with regard to provincial demands—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Trudeau: —and on the other hand that we lack leadership and that we weaken the federal government's position in the face of the onslaught of the provinces. We expect clichés and we do not mind them but we would really like to know what the opposition parties think about the constitution.

• (12:10 p.m.)

For two years or more they have been urging that we get on with the task of constitutional reform. At various times some members have urged that a committee of the house be set up, or that there be a vast national