

*The Address—Mr. La Salle*

Quebec. That popular consultation will surely leave obvious scars. But in view of circumstances, we must take a stand. The Progressive Conservative Party has committed itself, with the No committee, to protect the interests of this country and fight against its division.

● (1520)

May I say here, incidentally, that it is important to distinguish between disagreements on the orientation of the federal government policies, on the application of the principle of federalism in Canada, and the agreement of all political parties sitting in this Canadian Parliament on federalism as the foundation of the governing system in Canada. It is in that perspective that we join in this debate. Canadian and Quebec political parties are constantly brought into opposition on what steps should be taken or measures adopted, but all agree in promoting and protecting the collective geographic entity called Canada, with federalism as its basis, while at times adopting different attitudes or advocating different methods according to their political bent. It is in that spirit that we are participating in this debate, Mr. Speaker.

We suppose that federalism is a government system that can let Quebecers determine their own cultural future, while monitoring the areas where they have jurisdiction and allow them to contribute with other Canadians to the development of our country, of its political institutions guaranteeing our basic freedoms, of its natural resources which ensure our economic prosperity. We all want Quebec to develop. But there is disagreement as to procedure. Some people believe that all powers should be vested in the same authority; others like us try to distribute the risks and the benefits. We believe that the constitutional, legislative and administrative responsibilities should be managed by a public administration system divided between two democratically elected assemblies. We think that our basic liberties will be better preserved that way. In other words, a new evaluation of power-sharing is needed, and this is urgent, Mr. Speaker.

I must recognize that federalism has not only negative but also positive aspects. The first advantage might be that it forces us to compromise continuously. When you have to share with others, you must consider their views, and it prompts you to question your own views, which might ensure a more balanced development. This is a positive aspect of federalism that should be maintained. This debate will give us a chance to demonstrate and throw some light on other aspects of our government system. This referendum period should give each side the opportunity to show the advantages of its option rather than to systematically destroy the option of the other side. Let us use the coming days to seriously and thoughtfully consider our options. I recognize that it will be difficult and as discussions tend to become more heated, each of us must keep a cool head.

If the Progressive Conservative Party joins the federalist forces in Quebec in spite of its differences with the present Canadian administration, it is because we believe in the future of Canada. We understand the frustration of many Quebecers and we share it to a large extent. The majority of provinces and their governments want an in-depth reform of the constitution. If we refer to the history of French Canada and its

relationship with all Canadians, we see that justice and the interests of others have not always been respected. The legitimate demands which were disregarded are a point to be raised in the debate. However, this frustration does not justify the intention to yield our joint ownership of Canadian territory at a time when there is a consensus on the need for important reforms.

It must be admitted that demands do not always entail confrontation. We must not hesitate to shape levers for tomorrow through debate. In this way, we will serve Canada. Let us acknowledge that Francophones have a national conscience and let us guarantee them through future reform; the means to attain self-fulfilment. Let us believe in the future of Canada which allows, under its much criticized constitution, a fundamental debate on its existence. In voting No to the referendum question, I admit that at heart I still remain a provincialist who believes in a federalism much more flexible than the one devised up to now. In joining the federalists, I must insist that I do not endorse in any way the status quo. I think, and I hope, Mr. Speaker, that if Quebecers give a No answer next Tuesday, the federalists sitting here will not interpret this answer as an approval of the present system. That is what I venture to believe. And it is for that reason, Mr. Speaker, that many Quebecers hesitate to comply with the request made here by the federal members, because after the last 12 years, we necessarily have very strong reservations to make about the honesty of this government, because the situation in which we find ourselves could have been avoided in the last 12 years.

Thousands of Quebecers will feel like the ex-colleague of the present Prime Minister, our ambassador to Paris, who said that thousands of Quebecers will vote Yes because they want to force this government to make a long-awaited opening. For this reason, unlike our colleagues who gave a blank cheque to their Prime Minister and who, after brushing aside a proposal made by the Quebec government, were not able or did not have the courage to make any proposals on this renewed federalism, we are concerned on this side of the House, because we have witnessed the refusal of this government to sit down seriously with the provinces in order to propose the amendments that are necessary, and not only for Quebec.

I am happy to see that from time to time my colleagues from other provinces show their concern for their province, because I feel my first duty in the House is to look after the interests of the province I represent, which are not inconsistent with the national interests as a whole. Even those failures and refusals over so many years—and I conclude, Mr. Speaker—have brought us today to a situation where Quebec is asking fundamental questions about its future. Those who are mostly responsible are not in Quebec, they are here, because they did not have the courage perhaps or simply the respect of a population that would not have liked anything better than to get along with the rest of the country, but in mutual respect.

● (1530)

[English]

**Hon. John Roberts (Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment):** Mr. Speaker, this is the first time a minister has addressed the House holding the two responsibilities I do, that is to say, that of Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of