

The Joe Clark Comedy Hour

by Gretchen Pohkamp

People started filling the room an hour before the performance. By the appointed time, there was hardly even elbow room in the back of the assembly. People spilled into the next room. Television lights brightened the space and a plethora of microphones hung precariously on the podium. All that was needed was the drum roll.

You might wonder who created so much excitement on Friday afternoon at Dalhousie Law School. And you'd be right. It was the Joe Clark Comedy hour, complete with oneliners and the famous "...If we'd only had a few more days..." routine.



"I proved that a law degree isn't necessary to reach the highest office of the land."

Constitution

What was billed as the leader of the opposition's major proposal on the patriation of the constitution was in fact a short policy statement peppered with jokes about his own ineptness.

"I'd like to make a brief statement, a modest proposal to bring the constitution home," said Clark. In the 19th century Jonathan Swift also made a modest proposal. His called for the killing of the poor as a solution to poverty. Clark's proposal was not as sarcastic an attack on government measures as was Swift's, but did suggest that the Liberal amendment formula will only cause delays.

Clark said that the Liberal proposal would allow the federal government to change the constitution without provincial support. This, he said, is contrary to the nature of Canadian federalism.

Clark proposed that the present Liberal package be split in two, separating the patriation portion which must be agreed to by Great Britain from the charter of rights and freedoms which is a wholly Canadian issue. He said that sending both parts to Great Britain for approval might cause unnecessary delays if the British are not satisfied

that the Charter protects all Canadians.

"Let us act like the mature sovereign people we are; render unto Canada what is Canada's to decide and unto Britain what is Britain's," said Clark.

Clark said that by separating the two issues, the primary concern of patriation could be resolved quickly while the more complicated matters could be put on the back burner.



"...so I quit law school..."

But we have someone to look after legal matters in the family ... my wife!"

The vehicle he suggested for constitutional reform would be a constitutional conference made up of 110 people from across Canada. Included in the 110 would be lay people as well as politicians; federal members as well as provincial representatives; Social Creditists as well as separatists; a whole spectrum of people to represent all Canadians.

Protection of Rights

There are three ways to guarantee the fundamental rights of Canadians, said Clark. The rights can be entrenched in the constitution as in the U.S. and France; they can be protected by common-



"Are you running the show or am I? It's a Crosbie; they always run the show!"



"I spent a lot of time and effort working in Quebec; I moved my party from 20 per cent of the vote to 11 per cent!"

law and the legislature as in Great Britain; or they can be partly entrenched and partly legislated as has been the custom in Canada.

"We should extend and strengthen this Canadian tradition of protecting rights by both methods," said Clark. "Our rights are not protected well enough now."



"... agreement? A few more days and we would have had an agreement."

Provincial Rights

Clark was questioned about the agreement he made as Prime Minister to give offshore mineral rights to the provinces. He said Canada needs economic power in all of its parts, so that everyone gets heard. He suggested that it is not the force of the personality of the leaders but the force of the purse which gives the provinces clout at the bargaining table.

Clark said that a trade off of rights is necessary to get the provinces to agree on constitutional reform.

"The federal government is being unreasonable on some points," he said. "It is fundamentally wrong for the federal government to impose something on the provincial governments."

He said his proposal to put the debate on the back burner would facilitate agreement because the provinces would be involved in the decision-making process, and would not be pressured by artificial deadlines.

Even though decisions reached at this proposed conference would not be binding, Clark said it would be unlikely that the government would ignore the suggestions.



"I developed my interest in law at a movie theatre watching Jimmy Stewart act as lawyer. All he ever did was fish and read."



"I came to Dalhousie unprepared in 1962... I forgot my umbrella."

Supreme Court of Canada

Clark said that it should not be a constitutional requirement that one-half the judges on the Supreme Court be women.

"Whatever we do in law, there will be no substantive move to equality for women unless we make more appointments," he said. But those appointments should not be regulated.

The National Association of Women and the Law recommended to the special joint committee on the constitution that the constitution guarantee a representative number of women on the supreme court.

Clark said that in his term of office he made one appointment to the Supreme Court

and that was a man. He said it is hard to find women who could have enough free time to take appointments because they are often tied to the home and less mobile than their male counterparts.

Prime Minister Trudeau recently appointed another man to the Supreme Court after he was told there were no qualified women available. This, he found out later, is not so.

Education

Clark said that the federal government should play a leadership role in education. He said control of cultural and education matters is fundamental to the provinces but the ministers of education have not been successful in getting standardization of education requirements across the country.

"One answer is to make the federal system work," said Clark. "We must accept jurisdictions, not fight over them." He said that governments must recognize that Canadians are a highly mobile people and lack of unified education standards is causing problems.

Leadership

"I'm safe," said Clark in reference to his ability to retain the leadership of the Progressive Conservative party. He said the party has built in a review procedure which takes place at every annual meetings. If the P.C. party wants to be the majority party in Canada, they are going to have to be able to take internal unity for granted, he said.

"We live in a cynical society, with a dangerous mood," said Clark, "but I feel I can convince Canadians to give my party a chance."

And if that doesn't work, he can always get a job as a stand-up comedian.



"It's not hard to change an image... I had a great image when I started!"