

Some aspects of constitutional change may also not come easy to many in these old provinces by the Atlantic seaboard. I would ask them to believe that I am very much aware of the decisive part those provinces played in the creation of our country 100 years ago. I am very much aware also that economic progress there has been slower than in other parts of the country. I have joined others before me in trying to remedy that, but I am very conscious of the fact that much more remains to be done. Indeed, I regard the problem of raising economic levels in the Atlantic Provinces as a principal aspect of the total problem of maintaining Canadian unity. There will, I know, be support from those provinces for a programme of constitutional progress and reform, if only because they also would be surely and quickly injured if Canada were divided.

What I would say to French-speaking Canadians is perhaps best expressed in the programme of policy that I have put forward in the document entitled Federalism for the Future. I should like to say merely two things. The first is a comment on the suggestion that has been made that, if Quebec were to secede, it could then enter into negotiations with Ottawa in order to work out a modus vivendi with the rest of Canada while acquiring independent sovereignty. As someone not without experience in international negotiations, I should like to state my view that any such proposal rests on illusion - indeed, on a whole set of illusions. It is an illusion to think that a declared intention to seek a disputed divorce can be the basis for amicable and productive negotiations, especially when the parties concerned are still living in the same house or as next-door neighbours. It may even be an illusion to think that in such circumstances there would necessarily be an "Ottawa" that could speak for the whole of English-speaking Canada. Indeed, the whole proposal disguises the obvious fact that separation could not be carried out without rupture and loss and pain.

Secondly, and more generally and positively, I should like to say a few words to French Canada in explanation of the spirit that animates the course of action I think should be taken. It is designed essentially to create conditions - and with all possible speed - so that French-speaking Canadians may feel that every part of this country is their homeland. But this feeling requires understanding and goodwill and patience - on their part as well as on the part of English-speaking Canada.

Our federal proposals are designed to set in train a process of constitutional review so that Quebec may have the largest possible scope for the development of its own society, its own destiny, in Canada. But this process of change must be consistent - let there be no doubt on this - with the continued existence of Canada as a single federal state.

Since I became Prime Minister of this country, almost five years ago, I have been privileged to take some initiatives to help meet developing threats to Canada's very survival as a nation. In the course of the last few months, my Government has been giving careful thought to the results of these initiatives. We have been also ranging much more widely in our deliberations in order to leave no area unexamined where there might be opportunities for constructive action. It is to this end that we are presenting certain proposals at this conference.

Last October, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism submitted the first volume of its final report. That volume deals with English and French as the two official languages of Canada; with the basic issue of