

*The Constitution*

These eight Canadians, augmented by five more who volunteered to join the committee, and I would say that all people who volunteered to be on the committee in fact were on it, these 13 people worked to put together the views of Ontario riding. How did they do that?

The first process they participated in, as the group of 13, was organizing five public meetings in the riding. One was strictly devoted to high school students and four others were devoted to the community at large.

It happens that Ontario riding has four unique areas, three towns, Whitby, Ajax and Pickering, and of course the community of Claremont. There were four public meetings, one in each town. I can tell you that in each of those towns there was extensive advertising inviting Canadians from Ontario riding to come together to present their views.

There were these public meetings that were held. The public meetings brought a real variety of interest. I would say certainly the first observation that the committee reports on, one that I certainly noticed myself, that regardless of the views that existed on any one of the 28 proposals, there was very clearly an interest by all of those who participated that we must find a solution to this constitutional impasse.

Not only must we find a solution to this impasse, but we must get on with the other issues that face this country. They recognize that some of those issues could not be addressed until such time as the constitutional process was completed. There was really a very unanimous feeling that the only way we could successfully draw any conclusions out of the constitutional process was to end up with a united Canada, a Canada that stretches from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean with no great gaping holes in the middle.

There were really very clear views on that, but I would say that that is probably where the views started to separate. We had a very interesting process at the students' forum that was held at Trafalgar Castle School in Whitby where there were some 90 or so students. They showed very clearly their strong desire, not only to keep Canada together, but to recognize some of those things in this country that are different.

A major topic of discussion was the issue of "distinct society". I can tell you that the students really had no problem with the concept as expressed, that Quebec does have a very different language in the majority than

do other parts of Canada. It does have a very unique culture and a civil law tradition. The students of Trafalgar Castle School and the other schools that participated certainly support that concept.

Throughout the entire process, the other four public meetings, I can tell you there were many comments raised about the distinct society. One of the most common concerns—it is a recommendation of the Ontario riding committee—is that somehow the government has to be very clear and very precise in its meaning. Whatever verbiage it finally brings forward in the final constitutional proposal, it should be concerned about recognizing those things that are unique to Quebec in the Constitution.

It also wants to be sure that whatever that recognition is, it not be something that in fact reduces powers that other provinces or the federal government may want in their area of jurisdiction. They were certainly very clear on that. There were many points of discussion over that particular proposal.

One of the things we found most interesting was the discussion as it centres around some of the economic concerns that were raised in the constitutional process. It is very clear that the constituents of Ontario riding are most concerned about the economic future of this country. They certainly support the idea that we must have free and open borders within Canada for business to conduct its affairs, for the mobility of people, for the mobility of products and services throughout Canada. There was certainly a very strong feeling in support of that.

They wanted to make sure that however we arrived at that particular process, it enabled the Canadian economy to function. Certainly the point was very well raised by many who participated in the public forums that the process of free trade with the United States was there. Maybe we ought to have some free trade in Canada as well. I think that point is reflected in the report of the committee.

Another area, of course, that raised a lot of discussion was the whole issue of Senate reform. I would say that there were very few people who participated in the process who did not want Senate reform. Surprisingly though, there were some who said they believe in an appointed Senate, they do not want an elected Senate. I