

*The Constitution*

stand on its own merit as a viable, new, radical interpretation of the Canadian state and the people whose destiny it seeks to guide? After all, its proponents insist that it certainly mirrors today's reality more clearly than does our own.

But what is more illusory and short-lived than today's reality? Constitutions are designed for the centuries. What is there in today's reality that would serve future generations of our new nationality? What kind of country would we have when the national government would be perceived and treated, as it is now by many, as a distant, largely irrelevant imperial power by semi-autonomous provinces, eyeing each other suspiciously, eager to take offence, and anxious to exercise retributive power?

What motivation to greatness would there be in a nationality that believed that less is more, that you can come together by pulling apart, or that the ultimate objective is to think small? How will its people flourish with an economy characterized by fragmented domestic markets, a shrunken industrial base and expensive overheads?

If this vision of Canada were ever to be given constitutional form, I would fear for our posterity. The state would survive but it would ultimately become a body without a soul, alive yet lifeless, a Canadian Commonwealth perpetuated not for its own sake but for the convenience it offers its constituent members. In sum, Mr. Speaker, this idea frightens me. It is contrary to the intentions of our founding fathers and its implementation, I believe, would deny the aspirations of most contemporary Canadians.

What of the ancillary ideas which have accompanied this perception of Canada into the constitutional arena? If I may, I would like to comment briefly on the nature of the response our constitutional proposals have elicited in and outside this House.

I confess that I had expected something more uplifting than I have witnessed. After all, the federal Conservative Party is the possessor of a rich political heritage which I thought would have significantly shaped the style and substance of its members' arguments. But apart from the deliberations of the joint committee and a particularly fine address in this House by the hon. member for Edmonton East (Mr. Yurko), this heritage has been ignored by a strategy that more closely resembles the bitterly contested elections of 1979 and 1980 than it does a productive, reflective debate on the nature and future of the great Canadian experiment.

Admittedly, some Conservatives have advised compromise and conciliation but, at the same time, the party has bent every effort, much of it malicious, to pit west against east and anglophone against francophone, in a futile attempt to force total surrender upon the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). Yes, some Conservatives have supported, in fact have worked to improve, the charter of rights, but the vast bulk of their colleagues have treated the charter with unrestrained contempt.

These are not the only inconsistencies in the official opposition's reactions. Consider these as well. On one day it is the

protection of the sacred British principle of the supremacy of Parliament; on another day, indeed sometimes even in the same argument, it is a demand that Parliament abandon the debate so the courts might decide. Or some speakers will passionately demand more powers to the provinces or urge the maintenance of existing powers, while others will just as passionately insist that we transfer property rights from the provinces to the federal government in our new charter and they would all have Canadians believe that the British North America Act, without mention of the Deity or the family, was a superb Constitution, while the Canada Act, because at this time it mentions neither, is a seriously, if not fatally, flawed document.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, to mention the Vancouver formula, a modified Vancouver formula, a modified Victoria formula, no referendum, or a referendum before the package goes to Britain. Ah, the referendum! It strikes such unqualified terror in the opposition, but I confess I do not understand why. It was very obviously lifted from Australia. Since that country's dedication to democracy and federalism is surely unquestioned by members of all parties in this House, I should have thought that even a cursory examination of the Australian experience would have relieved any initial anxieties of the provincial premiers and their federal allies.

For example, since 1901 approximately 100 proposals have been considered for the purposes of referenda. Only 37 have been submitted to the people; eight passed and 29 were rejected, including every item which would have increased federal power at the expense of the provinces. So much for the tyranny of the majority.

In review, how do we account for the advocacy of a radical interpretation of Canada by the Conservative Party? How do we explain the party's anger and the anomalies of its constantly shifting arguments, including the ones which were made at today's press conference? How do we explain its irrational fears? Do they collectively reflect the opposition's traditional view of the state, the nation and the Constitution? I doubt it. There is little in their performance of D'Arcy McGee, Sir John A. Macdonald, Arthur Meighen or John Diefenbaker.

I suggest by way of explanation that all the evidence reveals a party in such intellectual disarray that no one has either the insight to draw on the magnificent traditions of its past or the courage to tame the passions its members have aroused or the prejudices they have exalted. If nothing else, this debate has vividly illustrated just how far a once proud party has strayed from its historical commitments under a leader preoccupied with mutiny and a field commander who mistakes unctuousness for piety.

On the other hand, this government's concept of Canada flows from the understanding that our founding fathers were creating a state with an identity separate from and superior to the individual colonies whose territories and people it embraced. That is why they proclaimed, proudly and confidently, that they had created a new nationality. That is why they invested the government of this new nationality with powers to control what they very clearly intended to be in a