

eral government on the exercise of their respective powers.

These elements, which allowed our country to develop, continue to do so, providing a great deal of flexibility, and, under the present Constitution, make it possible to conclude a host of agreements with certain provinces and regions, without the risk of being bound by one special agreement that might not have worked.

Many other changes will probably occur. The process is already under way. In the case of the distinct society, it has slowly evolved throughout the first hundred years of Confederation, or, as in the case of the social charter concept and an equitable Senate, it is merely a glimmer on the horizon. As in all parliamentary systems, these changes will not be the work of a single government and will probably give rise to stormy debate, but I hope that finally, the majority will agree to these changes.

We are concerned about relations between French Canadians and English Canadians and the division of powers between the federal government and the provinces. These issues have always been on the agenda, and the search for common ground and a way to adjust to the current situation have been constant in this process. The recognition of the French Fact, limited at first in 1867, now affects Canada at various degrees.

Is Quebec a distinct society? This question many of you are asking yourselves deserves an answer. There are people who wonder why the government insists on entrenching in the Constitution the recognition of the distinctiveness of Quebec society, while others are convinced that such recognition will give Canadians an inferior status. We must demystify this proposal, the intent of which is simply to acknowledge a sociological and political reality.

First of all, it must be pointed out that it is only one among the 28 proposals the government has put forward. The recognition of Quebec's distinctiveness was proposed in an attempt to meet the expressed needs of that province for recognition and respect, while at the same time preserving the fundamental equality of all provinces and all citizens.

The idea is to reaffirm that we approve and respect Quebec's distinctiveness. The preservation and promo-

tion of the French language in Quebec and the distinctiveness of our culture cannot be taken for granted by Canadians whose mother tongue is not threatened.

Canadians should be reminded of the institutional refuge provided by Quebec for six million of my fellow French-Speaking citizens and of its powers as first line of defence against the power of assimilation exercised by the 300 million other North Americans around us. In this context, by recognizing the distinct character of Quebec society in the Constitution, we are not granting Quebecers anything that other Canadians do not already have. This acknowledgement only ensures fairness.

Should we opt for the Canadian solution or a sovereign Quebec? In the end, Quebecers and Canadians will have to choose between a Canada in which Quebec can find a suitable place and a sovereign Quebec, which would mean the end of Canada as we know it. There are people who are in a hurry to push Quebec out of Canada and tell Quebecers things like: "Move out of there quick, but bring the furniture along". Indeed it would seem that illusion mongers have made a strange discovery, they have realized that Quebecers want to keep their Canadian citizenship, their Canadian passports, that they are quite happy with the economic and political system that has provided them with one of the best standards of living in the world, second to only one other country, that they are confident in their currency and are proud of their history.

Well, our country makers thought of a clever plan. Let's separate, they say, and keep from Canada whatever we like, whatever serves our own interest. Very original! How can we take seriously those who want independence for Quebec, but who say: Canada is unacceptable, however we want to keep the Canadian dollar; Canada is unacceptable, however we want to keep the Canadian passport and the Canadian citizenship.

Quebec's future within our federation must concern all Canadians. Our problem is that one quarter of our population, living in the strategic center of the country, wonders if we want them there, if they should leave. Therefore we are challenged to react to this possibility and find a way to allow Quebec to preserve and promote its own distinct society. However, those who believe that