

Dominion-Provincial Conference

government. It is important that we have genuine consultation between the government and the house and between members of the house. Participatory democracy should prevail in this area. This alone is sufficient reason for establishing a committee. It is particularly relevant because of the proposals put forward regarding the other place. We would be prepared to discuss these proposals very frankly with the Prime Minister. I have no hesitation in endorsing the general principle that the government is putting forward in connection with this reform, but I believe it would be very helpful if there were a joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons to engage in meaningful discussions regarding these reforms.

Furthermore, it is rather strange that constitutional discussion has been going on across the country, including in the provincial legislatures, but there has not been any opportunity for the parliament of Canada to confront these problems in a formal and continuing way. The Prime Minister did not expect to produce a new constitution in three days of meetings with the provincial premiers. We do not expect to get very far in producing a new constitution with only one day of discussion in this chamber. I earnestly suggest it would be very helpful to have a committee established. There should be discussions among the party house leaders as to the terms of the reference of the committee. It should not be restricted and confined to discussing only those matters previously discussed by officials. We have suggested this on numerous occasions, and I think this is an opportune time to proceed with it.

Some of us have recognized for a long time that this whole problem is exceedingly complicated and sensitive. It does not lend itself to oversimplification or sloganeering. I say this issue must be free of narrow partisanship. It does not lend itself to political one-upmanship either among federal parties or at the federal-provincial level. At this stage in Canada's history it would be very easy to arouse suspicion and resentment. It would be a very simple matter to divide this country very deeply and permanently. That is not my purpose and certainly not the purpose of the loyal opposition in this parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: We would be very happy to discuss in a continuing way any matter the Prime Minister would like to refer to a committee and we would be happy to hear his [Mr. Stanfield.]

views on the constitution. He is in no doubt as to where I stand regarding the constitution. He may have pretended to be in doubt during the last election campaign and again this morning. Those remarks were not made to seek enlightenment.

Mr. Trudeau: I certainly did not get any enlightenment.

Mr. Stanfield: It is more urgent now than it ever has been to face and resolve the problems of our federalism, not merely because time is running out but it is urgent also as in this last year there has been a discernable tendency away from reconciliation. Positions which were becoming flexible have begun to grow hard, and the attitude of the Prime Minister will not make them grow softer.

We all know enough of Canada to say that if our various parts are determined to be insular and intransigent, then our future is in danger. Yet we all also believe that if there is a will to unity we can achieve a strong, distinctive and creative unity in Canada. We have a particular responsibility here. We are the parliament of all of Canada, specially charged to bring the parts of Canada together and keep each strong. If hon. members opposite want to engage in a partisan debate we would not be happy to do so but would be prepared to do so, and the blood would certainly not be on this side of the house.

• (1:00 p.m.)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: I am afraid that, as in the case of the taxpayers, it would be the blood of Canadian citizens we would really be shedding. This Canadian debate has been renewed now almost for a decade. It has returned here for a day, and a few of us will be able to express our hopes and attitudes. We as individuals and as an institution have a larger continuing responsibility. That is why we urge the government to make it possible now for members of this parliament to participate formally and over a period of time in the working out of a consensus, a consensus which we will have to work very hard on in order to achieve.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) has completed his remarks.

Mr. Stanfield: Yes.

Mr. Lewis: If he has, may I call it one o'clock, Mr. Speaker?