

*The Constitution*

of losing sight of the major issues in this see-saw battle, with its myriad of recriminations from all sides of the House. Regardless of the changes that may be made in the constitutional document, and whatever may be included therein, it will not be worth a pinch of salt unless there is a desire and a will, not only on the part of the federal and provincial governments, but among all Canadians in all regions and provinces of Canada, to co-operate and together make the Constitution work.

● (2150)

As it now stands, Mr. Speaker, I cannot see this working unless the federal government relaxes its unilateral stand, starts bending a little, giving a little and not being inflexible in its deliberations on the Constitution resolution.

The government is saying that some of the changes it has undertaken in the Constitution are mandatory in order to keep faith with the people of Quebec and to keep Quebec in Canada after Quebec's positive referendum last May, not to secede from Canada, but to remain an intractable part of our great federation. But, Mr. Speaker, if the government is keeping faith with the people of Quebec, as it insists, surely it should have the support in this endeavour of at least one provincial party in that province for its constitutional proposals. But the fact remains, Mr. Speaker, not one provincial party in Quebec is backing the government.

Canadians all across our great land, Mr. Speaker, look upon the Constitution with worry and apprehension, because they know and understand that the constitutional resolution was not one that found birth through good faith and that it was not conceived through a reasonable level of consent by the provincial governments and the people of Canada.

With the government acting in a unilateral way, and acting contrary to the prevailing wishes of most of the provinces and adopting measures very much contrary to the wishes of the majority of the Canadian people, a constitution, illegitimately conceived as this one has been conceived, will carry no weight and literally will not be worth the paper it is written on.

Others before me in this debate, Mr. Speaker, have mentioned the constitutions of other countries like the U.S.S.R and the United States, which theoretically and in glowing terms, guarantee the rights and privileges of their citizens, but these same constitutions have faltered in several instances when the practicality of enforcing such rights was called upon, as was so eloquently expressed by a number of colleagues who spoke before me in this debate.

A constitution and bill of rights, Mr. Speaker, should serve to unite a nation and its people and to articulate its ideals—ideals, that are a vested interest and have input from a majority of its citizens.

Once a level of agreement has been reached on its terms, then and only then will it have the credibility and constant support and approval that is needed.

The only way, Mr. Speaker, that I can perceive this government's action regarding the Constitution—as it has been also

perceived by an ever-increasing number of Liberal senators in the other place—is that it is both unconstitutional and mischievous. I believe the only sensible action the government can take in the national interest, is to meet again with our provincial counterparts with a view to at least reducing the package to simple patriation with an amending formula made-in-Canada by Canadians and to working a consensus approach that will be amicable and agreeable to most Canadians.

It is my firm belief, Mr. Speaker, that if the constitutional crisis reaches Westminster, then to have our Constitution amended in Britain, surely is one way of reducing Canada to colonial status.

I believe that Canada is a mature country, inhabited by mature, well-thinking citizens, who, I believe deplore, as I deplore and regard as unthinkable, the idea that we should condescend to have another country do the work that is Canadian. It is our duty and responsibility to change our own Constitution; we must not shirk that duty and responsibility and ask another country to do the work for us. If such a responsibility is shirked, Mr. Speaker, and not acted upon, then surely the supreme sacrifice paid by fellow Canadians in two world conflicts and the Korean War to keep Canada free and democratic and to gain its independence as a sovereign nation, was all for naught.

If we are truly free and sovereign, Mr. Speaker, then let us take our responsibility firmly and settle our constitutional problems here in Canada by Canadians for Canadians. Somehow, Mr. Speaker, considering all the other national problems in our country, I strongly suspect a very false sense of urgency in the action of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) of trying to push through his constitutional package.

It reminds one of the similar false sense of urgency one finds in matters undertaken by people who try to push through a deal that would not meet the test of honesty, the scrutiny and thoroughness of investigation which would bring to light glaring pitfalls and perils that perhaps would not be apparent from a hasty examination of documents.

A constitution, Mr. Speaker, is the most important document in any sovereign country. It not only must have wide acceptance by its citizens, but before that happens, every detail and working part of that constitution must be thoroughly gone over, dissected, redissected and improved upon in order to gain the acquiescence, respect and confidence of its citizenry.

I feel quite strongly, and many Canadians feel just as strongly, Mr. Speaker, that Canada has no need of a patriated Constitution at this time. I do not believe that most Canadians have ever felt or expressed such a need. I believe that for the last 114 years, the BNA Act has served us well. It has provided Canadians with what it promises—peace, order and, on most occasions, good government.

As Canadians we are free to do what we choose. The fact that our Constitution rests in Britain is a matter that can be attended when the right time comes. The right time, of course, will be when the great majority of Canadians agree on how patriation should be achieved. According to the last poll, Mr.