

National Unity

gished Secretary to the Cabinet for Federal-Provincial Relations, Gordon Robertson recently pointed out, is that our two communities really make it their goals to promote the co-existence of two languages and various cultures in this country in a climate of mutual generosity and complete equality”.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, I must emphasize the fact that attitudes have to change and a better understanding must develop between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians if this country is to be kept united and that is possible! But I feel that we would be deluding ourselves to think that those changes of attitude so long overdue would be enough. The preservation of national unity also calls for a renewed federation: the anglophone community must agree wholeheartedly to such changes which will adequately protect and fully promote the French language and culture in Quebec. Moreover, all Canadians must soon accept the necessity of providing all minority groups, from everywhere in Canada, with the best guarantees possible ensuring them equal status and development opportunities.

● (2240)

In this spirit, Mr. Speaker, why not at the same time bring our constitution back unilaterally and make an official declaration of principle through a joint resolution of the Canadian Parliament and Senate? Having exclusive control over our own constitution, would it not be a symbolic affirmation that has now become timely and necessary? How long do we still have to wait uselessly to get out of what our Canadian Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) properly calls a “constitutional impasse that has frustrated governments of all political persuasions, both federal and provincial, for nearly 50 years”? Would it not be time to put an end to a unique and hardly enviable distinction of our country, that is the need to go before the British Parliament, the Parliament of another country, to change such and such basic aspect of our constitution?

But there are priorities of a less tangible kind that are important when human societies are buffeted by the uncertainties and the attacks on confidence that we find in the world of today. Affirmations of national will and indications of collective determination to renew and strengthen faith in structures and in values that unite people are symbolic, but they are important. Such a symbolic affirmation occurred, I think when the Parliament of Canada adopted our national flag. Does anyone doubt it has strengthened our sense of being “Canadian” or of being united for important purposes? A similar symbolic affirmation could occur if we were seen to attest our faith in our form of government by ending a defect that has flawed it for decades. We should not be seen constantly to be failing as a people in a matter that relates to the central structure of our national fabric. In short, it is well worth some attention from this parliament to conclude this long outstanding piece of national business.

This is the idea expressed by the right hon. Prime Minister in the House on April 9, 1976, before the election in Quebec of a government committed to independence or separation. In view of this acknowledged objective of the PQ government, the

[Mr. Pinard.]

unanimous consent of the provinces on an amending formula for the constitution seems to me illusive before the referendum they promised to hold has taken place.

It is evident that in the circumstances this unilateral patriation would not be done in a way that could bring changes in the distribution of powers or in the position of the provinces. Speaking about the unilateral patriation of the constitution, the Prime Minister of Canada said that if unanimous provincial consent is impossible to achieve “it must not provide any means by which Parliament could act unilaterally in future in any area where it cannot do so today since that would erode the essence of our federal system”. We will have to accompany the unilateral patriation with a temporary amendment formula providing for unanimous consent to change sections of the constitution which cannot be changed now in Canada without the unanimous consent of the provinces, while waiting to find more flexible and more comprehensive means to amend our constitution: this would result in the fact that a principle centred in London would be replaced by the principle of consensus in Canada.

We would have to take the advantage of the procedure concerning this unilateral patriation of our constitution to reaffirm clearly in a formal declaration of principles the undertaking of the Canadian Parliament and of the Senate, while exercising their power under the constitution, first to avoid any action likely to jeopardize the maintenance and development of French language and culture, and to take all possible means to preserve and develop it; second, to avoid any action likely to jeopardize the equality of status and the opportunities for development of minorities in Canada, and to find out all possible means to preserve the same equalities; third, to promote the same opportunities for all people who live in Canada, to ensure their well-being and to encourage economic development in order to reduce social and financial inequalities between people, wherever they live in Canada.

This federal declaration of principles, Mr. Speaker, accompanying the unilateral patriation of our constitution, would thus clarify the intention of the Parliament and the Canadian Senate concerning the rights of French-speaking people, minorities, individual freedom and regional disparities in Canada. This clear and official declaration, accompanying the great symbolic affirmation of our constitution patriation, would influence and induce those attitude changes I have already mentioned and which are so desirable, even necessary for Canada’s survival.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding I humbly suggest that my proposition, if implemented, would have the effect of paving the way for the two essential conditions for the safeguard of the Canadian unity: changing our attitudes and our institutions. Indeed, they would first enable us to influence and induce attitude changes, the feelings and magnanimity needed by our two linguistic and cultural communities so they can realize a great common goal: co-existence in conditions of reciprocal generosity and complete equality. And secondly, it would also offer a third alternative besides separation and status quo, in giving rise to a symbolic act of affirmation