

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, has the honourable senator decided how he will vote on October 26?

Senator Gigantès: Oh, come on! Do you intend to be a guttersnipe all your life?

Senator Kenny: You will find out in due course.

Senator Thériault: Can't you shut up for God's sake! You caused enough problems in 1990.

Hon. Mabel M. DeWare: Honourable senators, as a Canadian I would like to say how very disappointed I was this week to hear the National Action Committee on the Status of Women rejecting the Canadian round, a proposal for a new Constitution. This Canada round package, agreed to in Charlottetown, was arrived at after years of negotiations, as you all know. Ten years, yes. We can even go back to Victoria 1971. A "yes" vote on October 26 and a ratification in the legislatures of this country to the Canada round is the most important issue before us today. How can the national action committee say that this package undermines the rights of women?

The constitutional package was adopted by our first ministers, territories and Aboriginals with all Canada in mind. In the 1970s and 1980s, many interest groups were formed in the country whose purpose was to improve conditions for women and children in Canada. These organizations worked very hard to institute the concept of equal pay for equal work, for child care, to establish and fund shelters for abused women, for abortion rights and, yes, you might say anything that would create equal status for women in this country today.

I am not condemning the progress these organizations have made in this time. However, if they refuse to vote yes to help keep Canada together, I am afraid that all they have worked for will be for naught. I cannot understand why they do not see that the only way their goal of improved conditions and equality for women and children in Canada will come about is by economic development.

• (1530)

With economic development will come improved imports and exports, more investment in Canada, more consumer spending. All this will come about when the international community knows that Canada has put its constitutional package to bed and is united as one whole community.

The women represented under the NAC will realize that a "no" vote will hinder their progress. They will not have funds to continue their cause and their fight for women's issues because, if we lose this debate, the economy will not allow them to continue their work.

Women of this country, this package is for you, for all of us. For men, women, teenagers and our children and grandchildren. I urge you to vote "yes".

I have always been so proud to see our Canadian flag raised at the Olympics, the Summer Games and the Winter Games.

This week in Barcelona at the Para-Olympics, we have children competing for themselves and competing for us and they are so proud to represent Canada.

Fellow parliamentarians, let us make these young people proud of us and vote "yes" on October 26.

Hon. P. Michael Pitfield: Honourable senators, in the aftermath of the failure of Meech and post-Meech, the federal government was presented with a wonderful opportunity: the challenge of leading the provinces in the definition of a perception of our country that would unite the enthusiasm of all Canadians.

Canadians desperately want that. Canada needs it. The elements required for it have been there for some time. All that is needed is a government that is capable of iterating the idea and having the people believe in that idea.

For a while it could be hoped this might happen, that Canadians would be enabled to rid themselves at last of the endless conflicts over national unity that drain us of our energy and our creativity, seeming to cripple at birth so many important national dreams and endeavours.

In the event, the government has unfortunately been unable to meet this challenge. It did not lead. It followed. The consensus report of August 28, 1992, that it has produced not only has no central concept, but is in fact internally inconsistent. A dab here and there; more of this, more of that. At the end it will add greatly to the complexity and the weight of the already top-heavy, governmental, constitutional burdens we have. While it compounds the flaws of our constitutional system it militates against the genius of our system.

Now, in the irreversible consequences of the acceptance of pactism in our Constitution, we begin to see the real tragedy of Meech. We are presented with nothing more than a bunch of trade-offs between governments and some of the major interest groups in the country. The report has little relevance to the ordinary people. Certainly it will not unite their enthusiasm. It is far from the renewal it boasts to be. On the contrary, there is good reason to fear that we are witnessing the birth of a monster.

It is proposed that we have a referendum based on this document. We have no choice but to do that. Ottawa, Quebec, and to some extent other governments, have got themselves into a position where there has to be a referendum to get each off a hook that is overwhelmingly the result of partisanship, greed and ambition.

Moreover, we are put in the position where we have to support these proposals because, if we do not, there will be unleashed allegations of hostility to Quebec and injury to the unity of Canada which, however much unfounded, will nonetheless be vigorously exploited for the purpose of enabling the politicians involved to stay in power. In the constitutional version of "Chicken", the game is not to fear putting the existence of our country at risk.