

National Unity

The imbalance is apparent in considering even the most recent general election. While the Conservative party got 20 per cent of the total vote in Quebec, it got only 4 per cent of the seats. The Liberals, with 27 per cent of the vote on the prairies, won only 11 per cent of the seats. A special committee of parliament might consider the benefits and disadvantages of modified form of proportional representation and whether, by relating seats won more closely to votes, the problems of national unity might be alleviated.

I have no doubt such changes would have a profound impact on our federal system. They could alter its fundamental nature. But I believe that today's circumstances demand that we must be prepared to move beyond linguistic acceptance, beyond even constitutional realignments, to a re-examination of our entire political system.

In recent months members of parliament, journalists, academics, Canadians from coast to coast have begun to despair about the ability of this institution and other national institutions to cope with the great national problems that confront us. Parliament must not be seen to be impotent on this issue. It must not be seen as impotent by the people of Canada because, if it is, the cost not just to the credibility of this institution but to democracy itself will be extremely high. A parliamentary committee with broad powers to examine and question, to travel and hold hearings and to make recommendations, is one way to begin to put our own house in order, and the survival of our political institutions depends upon such an examination. Indeed, it could have the effect of alleviating the strains and stresses in our Confederation. As John Meisel has put it, "Motivated by the need to avoid disaster and to fashion a new community, we might thus create political institutions suited to the unique circumstances imposed by the regionally and ethnically divided nature of Canada and by the demands of the post-industrial society."

● (2030)

There are those who say that survival of our country is too strong a phrase to use with regard to the crisis of national unity which we face. I do not believe so, Sir, but I am interested in the survival of Canada, not in the political survival of the present government.

The resolution the government has placed before us should do more than to ask us to dedicate ourselves anew to Canadian unity—it should challenge us to take bolder moves, to examine all possible alternatives to create institutions that will ensure that unity. We must not only work but we must be seen to be working at federalism. And we must do it in this House! Let the government give us the forum—the committee—and we will get on with the job.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Bussières (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, I have decided to open my remarks on the motion proposed by the right hon. Prime Minister by quoting a very short passage of a speech of Mr. Gordon Robertson, which shows very clearly the

[Miss MacDonald.]

difficulty many people in this country have to feel like Canadians. Mr. Robertson said that over the years French Canadians have realized that English Canadians were not great enough to negotiate with them on equal terms, to acknowledge them as a community that deserves all our respect, to give them their rightful place in all areas of activities of our Canadian society. They have found out that we were unable to establish with them, even within the province of Quebec, relations based on dignity and respect. This brief quotation is taken from an address delivered by Mr. Gordon Robertson, Secretary to the Cabinet for Federal-Provincial Relations, during the graduation ceremony at Dalhousie University on May 12.

This finding of Mr. Robertson had already been repeatedly echoed in the report of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission. It has been expressed in many ways throughout the history of Quebec and of Canada. Its more acute expression, which caused the greatest shock to Canadians, was undoubtedly the election of the Parti Québécois. The election of the Parti Québécois was not merely a rejection of the Bourassa government in Quebec, it was also an end result and a crystallization of the profound feeling of inequality on the part of French-speaking Canadians of Quebec. The slogan of Mr. Lesage "Masters in our own home" and that of Daniel Johnson, "Equality or independence" were not just electoral catch phrases. They were the evidence of a collective will to be recognized as equal partners in a country that too often just tolerated them.

Mr. Speaker, are we as a country driving down a dead-end street? Have we reached a point where there is nothing more to be done? If we answer yes to these questions, it will be because we will have let fatalism, fanaticism or prejudices preside over the decisions regarding the future of this country. Why not build this future and define this country on the basis of tolerance and generosity? If we can be filled with tolerance and generosity, then the question lies as to how we must build this future and define this country. I will try, Mr. Speaker, to answer this question by a few suggestions.

The first point to which it is always important to come back is that of the basic equality of the two languages and the two cultures, French and English, all across the country. It has become common place to speak about bilingualism in this country and some remarks made today in this House lead us to doubt that this objective can ever be reached. Quebecers have always accepted the principle of co-existence between English- and French-speaking Canadians and that in a spirit of equal rights, mutual respect and dignity. However they know, and history proves it, that this principle has not been applied to them. If a French-speaking Canadian feels as a stranger outside Quebec, how can you expect him to feel attached to this country? If the French language had been granted in the rest of the country the recognition and the rights granted by Quebec to the English language, we would not be debating today the question of national unity. If all political parties had fought to support the policy of bilingualism that was drafted in the wake of the studies of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commis-