

The Constitution

should therefore make immediately in-depth changes to the Constitution as, according to them, this is absolutely essential for the welfare of all Canadians. We must admit that for many years serious attempts have been made to find grounds for agreement to the satisfaction of the Canadian people.

What were the causes of so many differences? They are quite simple, Mr. Speaker. First, we indulged in what I call acute idealism and thought the unanimity rule alone was essential. Ideally, discussions and negotiations in every area should lead to unanimous decisions. But, needless to say, in every day life things are quite different. Federal-provincial discussions are no exception.

We tried everything to involve the provinces in our process. But after first agreeing they turned round and tried to trade this patriation proposal for an unacceptable package deal that went beyond everything that was discussed last summer. I would even go so far as to say that the provinces were consulted and that they rally agreed to this measure on two occasions at least, in 1978 and during the Fulton-Favreau round of talks. Why do some of the provinces oppose this proposal, and why are they fighting it before the courts? In my view, this is beyond understanding.

They have a golden opportunity here to show their good faith, and it seems to me that instead of resorting to all sorts of chicanery before the courts, they would make a greater contribution to national unity by supporting the action we have initiated. It is a fact, Mr. Speaker, that 15 years ago the present Quebec premier was publicly supporting both patriation and an amending formula that was much less favourable to his province, at a point in time when talks were far less advanced than they are now. Today, he would have us believe that patriation is horrendous. I do not understand this, or rather, Mr. Speaker, I cannot stand that kind of political opportunism. Mr. Lévesque and his group want to wreck the building, as is well known, and in the same breath they hurry to support the walls of the building lest they crumble. How sincere they are! The premiers of the dissenting provinces are beginning to understand the subterfuge as they deal with the elusive Quebec premier. Why on earth trade off a measure that would benefit everyone against any sort of advantage? Do we have to remain the laughing stock of the whole world by being the only independent nation unable to amend ourselves our own Constitution? How odd, especially since this has been going on for 54 years! Let us therefore have the courage of our convictions; let us put aside our self-interests; let us show consistency and integrity. Commenting on the failures of the Adams statesmen in American political life, John Kennedy wrote, and I quote:

● (1650)

[*English*]

Yet their failures, if they can be called failures, were the result of their own undeviating devotion to what they considered to be the public interest and the

result of the inability of their contemporaries to match the high standards of honour and rectitude that they brought to public life.

If we adopt this measure, Mr. Speaker, I think history shall judge our action.

[*Translation*]

In addition, the bill now under consideration includes an amending formula which can give us a gleam of hope that some substantial amendments will be made to the British North America Act of 1867. On the one hand, we are allowing ourselves a two-year delay to continue to operate under the consensus rule which has always been enforced. On the other hand, we give ourselves an amending formula and a means, the referendum, to break a deadlock and make changes without being unconditionally at the mercy of a few provinces or of a high-handed majority.

The delay granted before the implementation of the new formula will enable the various Canadian governments to reassess their constitutional positions and probably to agree on several points before that delay expires. The Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Clark) disagrees with our procedure or would have us believe that he disagrees. However, I must point out to him that he is mistaken by maintaining the position he took at the outset of this debate, because he is playing into the hands, if such is not his purpose, of the very ones who cause the division and the racial tension which have developed in the country, yet, he knows full well deep down inside that we are acting in the general interest. The dissenting premiers know it as well. However, why are they challenging us?

An hon. Member: For the sake of challenging!

Mr. Tousignant: For the sake of challenging, of course, as my hon. colleague said. The reason is quite simple. All those fine people are trying to protect short-term, immediate political interests. Is there a better electoral platform, Mr. Speaker, than to brandish all sorts of bugbears, claiming jurisdictions, natural resources and provincial autonomy, all of which could be seized by the big bad federal government? Such facile and I would even say demagogic arguments are certain to catch the people's imagination. However, reality is quite different and it is simple. Why are these people trying to make it complicated? For the sake of immediate political interests, Mr. Speaker, out of sheer selfishness.

If people had the intellectual and moral honesty to speak the truth, 99 per cent of the population of Canada would agree with our approach. But no, they would rather entertain confusion. It is politically profitable for the Official Opposition to spread all sorts of falsehoods, gossip and even hatred, particularly in the West. Some members opposite, Mr. Speaker, even carry demagoguery to the point of associating the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Trudeau) with the metric system, mainly in the West. Can you imagine anything more ridiculous? One really has to be short of arguments to go that far, Mr. Speaker.