

Canadians would never have agreed to join Confederation if it had not guaranteed the legal existence of the French element in Canada. Thus, section 92(13) confirmed the existence of separate civil law in Quebec, and section 94 gave the federal Parliament authority to make provision for the uniformity of all laws in Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia all the while it being forbidden to change the Civil Code of Quebec adopted in 1866. That is why we can say with reason that Quebec is not a province like the others. Which does not mean that it is in any way worse than the others for all that. No, Quebec is not a province like the others, and the Fathers of Confederation were the first to say so. It was confirmed by the constitutional act of 1867 and it has been thus for 110 years. One Prime Minister of Canada alone spoke one unfortunate phrase, and he lived to regret it because it gave rise to much controversy in Quebec. Indeed, the right hon. Louis St. Laurent one day said that Quebec was a province like the others, which does not reflect the truth of the matter.

In 1977, the constitution no longer meets adequately the needs of either Anglophones or Francophones. More than ever before throughout Canada, there is talk of the need for a new constitution if Canadian unity is to be preserved. The problem does not exist only since the November 15 elections; it is not only since then that Quebecers in particular are not satisfied with the interpretation and application of the constitution by the federal government. Under Mr. Duplessis' government, Quebec fought against the centralization of the governments in Ottawa, and Mr. Duplessis insisted on their giving the provinces more autonomy. Remember the alliance between Mr. Duplessis and Premier Hepburn of Ontario to check the centralization of the then Liberal government. The struggle continued under Mr. Jean Lesage, the Quebec premier. He was the one who first used the expression "State of Quebec". Daniel Johnson went one step further and spoke of equality or independence. His reasoning was very logical. Bertrand, who succeeded him, continued in the same vein. Robert Bourassa, the Liberal premier of Quebec, even while Ottawa had a Liberal Prime Minister, could not get along with it where the constitution was concerned. Since 1867, the federal government has centralized the power and allowed French Canadians to be the victims of many injustices.

An English Canadian, named Gordon Robertson, recalled some of these injustices when speaking before the graduates of Dalhousie University in May 1977, and I quote:

His thesis is clear: "For more than a century, both at the provincial level, except for Quebec, and at the national level, our history is the denial of the very principle of the coexistence on an equal footing—or even simply of the coexistence—of both cultural communities."

Here are the facts:

He recalls a few facts, and I quote:

In 1885, Louis Riel was hanged because he attempted to defend the interest of French-speaking Metis in the west.

In 1890, Manitoba failed completely to consider the rights of the French language and made English the sole language in its legislative assembly, in its statutes and in its courts.

Of course, such measures are unacceptable, whether they originate from French or English-speaking people. What is

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right, is right! What is wrong is wrong! One has to recognize it. I continue that quotation:

In 1891, the clauses of the law regarding the French language were repealed in the Northwest Territories.

In 1905, the newly formed provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan denied any rights to the French language on their soil.

In 1913, Ontario passed regulation 17 which forbade the teaching of French in its schools.

And Mr. Robertson ended by the following remark which I quote:

Sweeping aside as an illusion the argument regarding the standard of living used by so many Liberals, Mr. Robertson predicts that lest the Anglophones start doing away with their pettiness, their lack of understanding and their hostility "the French Canadians will sooner or later rather take the chance of impoverishment in order to recover their dignity. A proud people cannot be bought".

● (1810)

If such were the comments of a Francophone, one could say that they came from someone who likes beefing, and does it all the time. But these were the comments made by an Anglophone who observed the situation, who knows that everything derives from history and simply intends to warn us against the situation we are presently experiencing in Canada. What is the use of talking about national unity when one knows full well that the federal government finds it to its advantage to keep the opinion of the provinces divided in order to keep running the show. This difference of opinion has been evident for quite some time. We find division everywhere. The provinces still feel dissatisfied after every conference. No one can or wants to agree. It has now been 50 years since the federal government and the provinces have been talking about patriating the constitution, but we have never succeeded in putting forth a formula for an amendment on which everybody could agree.

So long as we will not decide to deal seriously and in depth with a revision of the power sharing formula, it will be useless to expect to get a new constitution. We cannot expect to unify a country while there still are serious regional disparities and thousands of workers unemployed. Mr. Speaker, I will take the liberty to quote a few sentences which were pronounced in Toronto last March 21 by the Chairman of Royal Bank of Canada who said:

... the problem of Canadian unity which confronts us today (and which may very well destroy our country if we do not settle it) has its origin in the type of federal system which we have adopted.

And he added:

... it is not the time to replaster but rather to rebuild, a task which is inevitably linked to the constitutional reform, ... and in the review of our constitution we would be better off to study a system which would ensure better consultation mechanisms between the provinces and the federal government ... as the series of federal-provincial conferences which we have had so far seem to have turned into avenues of confrontation, contestation and political publicity.

Incidentally, we have had 27 federal-provincial conferences on that subject since 1963 but we have not moved one single step forward.

We were told a few weeks ago that personalities would tour the country lecturing on national unity. I would invite them to visit our constituencies and address our former textile, cloth-