

First, the Mulroney Government will have an unprecedented majority, at least in absolute numbers, proportionately to the total number of seats, the Diefenbaker Government in 1958 had a relatively greater majority.

Second, during the last 25 years at least, the party forming the Official Opposition had won at least twice as many seats as the other opposition parties. This time, the opposition parties are numerically much closer to each other than ever before. There are only two of them, while in similar circumstances in the past, the opposition was clearly more varied. What new dynamics of relationships between the majority and the minority, as well as between the two minority parties, will come out of this situation? There is no doubt in my mind that this places the parliamentary reform mentioned in the Speech from the Throne under a much different light than was previously the case.

● (1540)

There is a third factor, which is also mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, namely, that for the first time in quite a while, all the regions including Quebec are well represented in the government and the political party to which it belongs. However, no region has such a hold on that party as to threaten the existence of the government because even without the seats it has won in any one of them, even without the seats of its Ontario or Quebec membership, the government would still have an absolute majority in the Commons. This situation seems to me unprecedented. This extraordinary situation will give the government greater freedom of movement while imposing upon it more constraints as the Canadian mosaic now has all the required spokesmen within the government party.

As a fourth and last comment, I will say that there is nothing new in the fact that the Progressive Conservative Party has won a majority of seats outside Quebec. On the contrary, this has been the case in all elections held between 1957 and 1980 with the exception of 1968. In spite of this, the majority it won outside Quebec allowed this party to come to power only four times in the last ten general elections, including three times as a minority government.

In Quebec, the Progressive Conservative Party had not won a majority of seats since the 1958 election. Even then, this happened in very special circumstances which had nothing in common with those of the last election. When viewed on the backdrop of the last 25 years, what happened on September 4, particularly in Quebec, takes on a very special significance. However, we must take care not to interpret this fact prematurely or wrongly. Thus, the fact that the people of Quebec then voted as most other Canadians did ought not to lead anyone to conclude that henceforth they consider themselves as everybody else and renounce their collective identity as a distinct society.

All things considered, how can one explain changes of such magnitude which have occurred and been witnessed to the same extent throughout the country? What is their meaning and impact?

[Senator Tremblay.]

Political pundits and analysts of electorate behaviour will find there choice material for their work and will make sure that they study it in depth to highlight all essential elements.

It would indeed be foolhardy of me to entertain more or less fanciful guesses about such recent events. I shall therefore limit myself to pointing out what everybody has seen as an obvious fact: the conscience and conviction that a lot of things had to change in this country have been expressed altogether clearly through the behaviour of Canadian voters on September 4.

Quite obviously, that deep-felt desire for change which was so strongly voiced throughout the country was not aimed simply at substituting a political formation for another so as to achieve a majority in the Commons, nor at replacing a government team by another to take over at the federal level.

By making those changes which were a prior condition, Canadians wanted above all that at the same time there would be new directions as well as fresh policies and programs, and they also wanted a change in the style of government.

How and in what way? That has been highlighted in the Speech from the Throne read yesterday by Her Excellency the Governor General.

By their significance and diversity, the measures announced in the Speech from the Throne leaves no doubt whatsoever that the government wants and is determined to steer the country towards national reconciliation, economic renewal and social justice; no doubt whatsoever that the government wants and is determined to achieve that purpose through consultations between the two levels of government, between the federal government and the provinces while respecting their respective jurisdictions, with a view to harmonizing their actions and reducing if not eliminating duplications.

The government is convinced beyond any doubt, as Senator Macquarrie just said, that the 1982 constitutional agreement will remain incomplete as long as Quebec is not part of it. The government will strive to create the conditions required to achieve such an important objective.

The government is clearly determined to consult in a systematic and orderly fashion with the various groups and decision-makers concerned with economic development: businesses, management, employees, and different associations of employers and employees that are part of the structures in a democratic society such as ours, so that they will be fully involved in the complex, lengthy and difficult task of shaping an economic consensus.

Finally, there is no doubt that the government is ready to take into consideration the changing needs of the under-privileged groups and to improve many features of the social security system.

All those principles which so clearly appear in the Speech from the Throne were already included in the commitments made during the election campaign. They were foreshadowed by these steps taken by the new government since it was sworn in on September 17.