

*The Constitution*

I believe my distinguished colleague, the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), can be credited with the saying that "you cannot eat a constitution and constitutions do not employ anybody".

I know from my contact with people, not only throughout my own constituency but during a month-long campaign in the Hamilton West riding and a mid-summer trip to western Canada, that Canadians are far more concerned with the frightening national deficit, ever-increasing unemployment, and the double digit inflation in this country. Even this past week some of my people were wondering why Parliament has been recalled to spend time talking about the constitution, after all we have heard this past summer, and not dealing directly and immediately with a national energy policy. That is not a bad question.

The government may have set December 9 as the deadline for the Special Joint Senate-Commons Committee on Constitutional Reform to complete its hearings, but by December 9 Canadians will be well past the point of no return in terms of any decisions that we make in this Parliament on the average Canadian's budgeting plans for the cost of keeping warm this winter. Whatever results from this great Canadian debate on the constitution will, the government presumes and, we hope, last us for at least another 113 years.

● (1430)

What Canadians in Hamilton-Wentworth, and I suspect in a great many other communities as well, would like to know is what kind of energy security will they have for the next three, or indeed, 13 years. When you talk to people about the constitution they really do ask: what is the fuss all about? What is the rush all about? The only person in one of the major towns in my riding, Ancaster, who would venture an opinion on the constitution was an elderly lady who said, "I have got to go and read up on the BNA Act and find out what they are going to do to it". Nobody I questioned at any of the fall fairs knows how it is done or why it needs to be done.

When you talk about cutting ties with Britain, people in my area do get exercised, but their ties with the mother country are more emotional than governmental. But the feeling generally is that bringing home the constitution will not affect the average true Canadian, strong and free, anywhere in Hamilton-Wentworth. Folks do say, though, it is high time we governed ourselves. But then most people think that is what we have been doing all along.

There is widespread concern, confusion, and raising of eyebrows at all the rhetoric at the recent first ministers' conference. Random samplings of my constituents suggest that all ten provincial premiers were guilty of parochialism of the first order. When you ask them how they feel about the new constitution, as proposed by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) the folks I represent are likely to say that this is not the kind of issue they would expect an opposition party to oppose. Then they add, "But of course nobody here is aware of any of the nasty little wrinkles in it."

This 49-page document before us may be emblazoned with a nice red maple leaf flag, but it is indeed dotted with red flags throughout—those nasty little wrinkles. As my leader put it:

It's a Trojan horse. It looks like it's what we want. It achieves patriation. But it is absolutely dangerous and fundamentally changes the nature of this country.

My leader is dead right. Once that Trojan horse gets inside the walls it will release soldiers who will give many people across this country reason to think about what this government is doing.

The government, through the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice, has expressed the hope that this debate will rise above political partisanship. Let me make it clear at the outset—I have two views on letting party allegiance and political bias intrude on an historic debate such as this. The first point I will put on record is that I, like all members of this party, favour patriation of the constitution. I believe it is long past due that Canadians should have control over their own constitution. I favour the entrenchment of a charter of human rights and fundamental freedoms in that constitution. I do have reservations about the imposition of minority language educational rights in the Prime Minister's announced package. I will deal with that in a moment. I strongly recommend the Bill of Rights, preamble and all, be enshrined in this constitution as a lasting tribute to the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker.

My second point about getting political in this kind of debate is that the Prime Minister has made it impossible to submerge one's partisan stirrings, and at the same time the whole unilateral manner in which this government is proceeding has whipped my feelings as a Canadian into a near frenzy. Concerns have been raised and rebuffed in this chamber about the government keeping up its advertising campaign while this debate is in progress. I am wondering about the travel at taxpayers' expense, such as special government aircraft to the United Kingdom as when Mark and John went off to see the Queen.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacGuigan) and the Minister of State for Science and Technology and Minister of the Environment (Mr. Roberts) had lunch with the Queen at Balmoral Castle. Then they visited with Prime Minister Margeret Thatcher. That is all fine since it was being done through the Canadian High Commission. But now we learn the two ministers have been wining and dining British journalists and publishers around London to explain the government's point of view, that is, the Liberal point of view, the one, dominating party point of view here. And a question which could be asked is whether any of the opposition parties, any spokesmen from the opposition parties, have been getting to these influential people in the United Kingdom. What upsets us is that we, the taxpayers, pay for all of these luncheons and dinners. We are paying for a unilateral action we do not believe in.

The corollary is that the Prime Minister's cabinet will be fanning out all across the country to spread the message, the propaganda, at government expense, at taxpayers' expense—our expense. They will be concentrating, of course, in western