

The Address

we can concentrate on the nation's real problem I mentioned a few moments ago: the economy, unemployment, the environment, social security—all those problems facing us now. Otherwise, we will still be talking about the Constitution. That is why, I repeat, we must deal with these problems quickly, fairly and effectively.

Our party is not afraid to take a stand. Three weeks ago, it presented a method and a program. We wanted the government to be able to put these proposals before Canadians on June 1, because we must realize the situation is precarious and that this has a negative impact on the economy. We must take the situation in the province of Quebec seriously. We may be faced with a referendum there as early as next year, in the spring.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chrétien: Why wait until September 1? We will lose three months. It will be 1992 before we know it, and we only have five months of public hearings. Of course, that is the government's decision, the real reason being that, once again, it doesn't really know what to do. It is too afraid to offend. Oh, we cannot afford to provoke Mr. Bouchard. We can't afford to provoke Mr. Manning. I say it is high time we got this over with!

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chrétien: We must speak candidly to Canadians. The government agreed with the idea of having a committee of the House of Commons and the Senate study a constitutional proposal, and it is to be commended for its decision. However, this means it will no longer be possible to have a constituent assembly, because we will then have a concrete proposal, already put before Canadians after consultations across the country. Why this ambiguity? Time is of the essence. I agree, the provinces must be consulted and we have to consult with native groups, but we must start now, otherwise we will once again be caught with our backs against the wall.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for? We say, let the people decide. Last year and the years before that, the people did not have a chance to decide. After the Accord, we had committees travelling across the country, and part of their mandate was that they could not accept a single amendment. Why appoint a committee if no amendments can be made? We had one here in the House, a committee appointed at the last minute, which did excellent work, a committee chaired by the present Minister of the Environment, a committee that managed

to obtain the unanimous approval of this House. Not a single member rose in the House to speak against the committee.

It was a compromise which respected the five conditions set by Quebec. However, the Prime Minister, I'm not sure under pressure from whom, decided to set it aside, to ignore the work done by the House, for reasons as yet unknown. As a result, we had this disaster last June.

We say: Let's have a referendum early in 1992. Why a referendum? Because the time has come for people to speak. They will be asked to consider a proposal.

[*English*]

This project has to be the Canada round. We cannot try to solve the constitutional problem by dealing with the problems of one part of Canada before the others.

I say that in my own province when I am there. What would the reaction have been last year, or three years ago, if they had said: We will solve the problems of western Canada. We will come back here after that. It would have led to a lot of suspicion.

Let's have a Canada round. The Prime Minister and his ministers who are here are using that expression now and I am happy. We have a Canada round where everybody will feel comfortable. We do not have to have commissions to know that westerners want to have an elected Senate.

They want to participate, because the nature of Canada put the majority of the people in Ontario and Quebec. They feel rejected by a parliamentary system which, unfortunately, when your members are with the government, you feel that you are not well represented. So often they speak out in the caucus and they have to vote with the government in the House.

Having an effective Senate, they will have the feeling that they have been heard. Even if the decision is not according to what they wish, they will be comfortable because at least they will have been heard. They made their case and their elected people spoke openly about their problems.

We have to have the Canada round. Everyone knows that. When we have the package, the contents of which I will describe to you, there will be a referendum. Why do I want a referendum? Because this Prime Minister last year, in a very irresponsible way, for weeks and weeks and weeks created the impression that if the agreement