

Final constitutional debate begins

The House of Commons began the last round of constitutional debate on February 17, following the tabling of the final report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on the Constitution.

The Joint Committee was formed last autumn to study and amend a proposed resolution presented by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau with a view to patriating and modifying the Canadian Constitution.

A majority of Quebecers voted last May in a referendum and refused the Quebec government a mandate to negotiate sovereignty-association. Following the referendum, Prime Minister Trudeau told the House of Commons that the decision of Quebecers did not constitute a vote in favour of the *status quo*. "We cannot venture to ignore this will to change which reflects that of other areas of the country and to fall short of the expectations of Canadians. This is why, on May 14, I solemnly undertook to launch the constitutional renewal and never stop working at it until Canada finally has a new Constitution," said Mr. Trudeau.

A First Ministers' meeting on constitutional reform was held in Ottawa, September 8-13, but the Prime Minister and his provincial counterparts were unable to reach agreement at the meeting.

Resolution proposed

On October 2 Prime Minister Trudeau, addressing the nation on radio and television, announced the government's plan to present to the federal Parliament a resolution calling for the patriation of the British North America Act (BNA Act), Canada's principal constitutional document and for adoption of a charter of rights. The BNA Act created the Canadian federation in 1867 from a group of British colonies. It is an act of the British Parliament. In 1931 when Canada's full sovereignty was recognized by Britain, changes in the BNA Act were left in the hands of the British Parliament at Canadian request because of difficulty in Canada in arriving at a constitutional amending formula.

The current proposal would request the British Parliament to divest itself of this historical anomaly and to provide for a process to amend the BNA Act in Canada. Thus the BNA Act would be brought

to Canada or "patriated". The proposal before Parliament would take the occasion also to have a charter of rights included in the Constitution. In addition to strengthening legally traditional Canadian liberties, the charter would confirm the equal place of the English and French languages in all federal institutions and guarantee educational rights to French- or English-speaking minorities, where numbers of people warrant, in all parts of the country.

Constitutional committee

The debate in the House of Commons, which followed the announcement of the resolution, led to the creation of the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution.

The committee was co-chaired by Senator Harry Hays and member of Parliament Serge Joyal. It comprised ten senators and 15 members of Parliament, constituting 15 from the Liberal Party, eight from the Progressive Conservative Party and two from the New Democratic Party.

The public was invited to present written reports to the committee and on November 17 radio and television networks began broadcasting the proceedings of the committee.

The committee, which began its work November 6, sat for nearly 300 hours. As of February 2, 914 individuals and 294 groups had made their views known to the committee. Among those appearing before the committee were the premiers of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and representatives of the Yukon and Northwest Territories governments.

In January, on behalf of the government, federal Justice Minister Jean Chrétien placed before the committee amendments to the initial resolution presented in October. The Progressive Conservative Party and New Democratic Party also presented their amendments.

The main amendments adopted by the Joint Committee concerned the recognition of the rights of native people and their participation in constitutional meetings touching on matters of their interest; recognition of the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces over the exploitation, conservation and management of non-renewable natural resources; and certain modifications relating to the process of amending the Constitution and holding referendums.

Aid to Kampuchean refugees

Canada will contribute \$3.75 million to Kampuchean relief operations in 1981, Secretary of State for External Affairs Mark MacGuigan announced at the recent special session of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Board held in New York.

The funds come from the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) humanitarian, emergency and refugee relief budget, and will be channelled through UNICEF, which is coordinating relief operations in the region.

The grant will aid Kampuchean refugees in refugee camps in Thailand, those along the Thai-Kampuchean border, Kampuchean still in Kampuchea and Thai villagers who are affected by the situation.

Canada's first made a commitment to contribute substantially to the 1981 Kampuchean relief operations at the United Nations' pledging conference held last year. Firm pledges from other donors at that conference and other pledges made to date total about \$100 million, towards a target of \$235 million.

Canada provided \$15 million in cash and food aid in 1979-80 to support relief for the Kampuchean people by UNICEF, the Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In 1980-81, Canada gave \$1.8 million to help finance various efforts by the Red Cross and Canadian voluntary organizations, including World Vision of Canada, Canadian University Service Overseas, the Mennonite Central Committee, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, and Oxfam Quebec.

Canada-Japan coal venture

Seven major Japanese companies have signed contracts clearing the way for the first joint Canadian-Japanese development of Canadian coal resources.

Japan's big six steel-makers and Mitsui and Company, a trading company, agreed to acquire a 40 per cent equity in a \$180-million project to recover coking coal from Alberta's Gregg River district.

The Japanese companies, which signed with Alberta's Gregg River Resources Limited, agreed to bear 40 per cent of the cost of the project. Industrial sources said the Japanese companies have agreed to buy 2.1 million tons of coking coal.