

The Constitution

and undo everything they have done. It is somewhat analogous to what could have happened to the Minister of Justice when he was in hospital earlier this year. What if his doctor had come to him and said "while you are here, I will take out your liver", to which he would have replied "I am not in favour of that". What if the doctor had argued and said to the Minister of Justice, "It does not matter what you think. If you do not like it after I take it out, you can get some other doctor to put it back in". That is wrong, Mr. Speaker. But perhaps, as the Prime Minister says, Canadians will forget that.

Perhaps Canadians will forget that the government acted unilaterally over the express opposition of 65 per cent of the Canadian people. Perhaps they will forget that the government tried to bypass the courts by ensuring that by the time the Supreme Court had a chance to rule on the legality of the proposals, they would already be law. Perhaps they will forget the many improvements to the charter that were rejected by the Liberal-NDP alliance, including the right to hold and enjoy property. Perhaps Canadians will forget the divide and conquer tactics so clearly spelled out in the Kirby memorandum and so clearly demonstrated here today in the speech given by the Minister of Justice. Perhaps they will even forget that the Prime Minister, who began this exercise by complaining of the humiliation of having to go to a foreign country to amend our Constitution, chose to do precisely that instead of bringing our Constitution home and amending it here.

Even if time obscures those bitter memories, permanent change will have taken place in our country that for all time will create first class and second class Canadians. People living in Ontario and Quebec will have a permanent veto on any future change to our Constitution. They will have that veto no matter whether the population in either province grows, remains static or shrinks, while Canadians from other provinces will not have that veto.

Every single time that this discriminatory amending formula is used to remind some Canadians of their second-class status, bitter memories will be recalled and the good will that provides Canada's constitutional glue will be weakened.

As I conclude my remarks, I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that I think this country will stay together. I pray that it will. The glue which has held this country together and has managed to overcome centrifugal forces, which have threatened to tear it apart for over a century now, has been good will, common sense and self restraint. Yet what we find in the government's actions is a denial of good will, actions in the face of common sense, and an attack upon the very federal system which has served Canadians so well.

Before we vote on these amendments, the government has the time to change its policies, and I ask in the name of Canada that the government take advantage of that opportunity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Henri Tousignant (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend today to give an historical account of Canadian federalism. This has been done many times already. Even after reading many books and consulting numerous experts, I have concluded that everyone has his own interpretation of the facts. We must therefore consider the record of Canadian federalism and the initiative we are taking today in a much more general perspective. In my opinion, this record is certainly not as dismal as some would have us believe. Of course, it is difficult for us, 113 years later, to know what the Fathers of Confederation truly intended and if their original purpose has finally been achieved. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the federalism developed by the Fathers of Confederation has served us well, and we have proof of this every day. How could we not recognize, for instance, that a small population of 23 million people scattered on such a vast territory has been able to achieve such a standard of living and provide infrastructures across the country, such as roads, telephone services, telecommunications, and so on. How is it that in spite of this geographic vastness which should give rise to numerous natural disparities among the various regions, we have been able to make these regions relatively and equally prosperous. The federalism of the Fathers of Confederation has served us well in spite of the limited means available to them at the time, such as the lack of information and communication services.

The constitutional discussions of 113 years ago were held with much less ceremony than today. No one can tell me that every Canadian citizen had detailed knowledge of every section of the constitution. Early in this century, very few people needed a public relations officer to tell them what they wanted. The Canadians of that time certainly had fewer opportunities to express themselves than today. Now, everyone wants to decide, everyone wants to intervene, many probably only for their own personal glorification. While we have managed quite well with what, it must be admitted, is a rather rudimentary framework compared with the one we have today, as concerns preparation, consultations, representations, legal notices, jurisprudence, and so on, I believe that the proposal now under consideration will be greatly refined, not to say a real masterpiece, compared with the one we were given 113 years ago.

Of course, some people will tend to question this brief and rough analysis, to indict our forefathers of 1867 and convict them without further ado. I would reply that only the weak prefer to quibble about past events. Some will say: "I told you so. It was to be expected. They should have acted otherwise, and so on." The formula used by the great architects who are building the future is obviously different and not as simplistic. However, we must face the facts. For some years, we have been hearing what I would call the glory boys of the cicada family tell us that the Canadian government needs to enhance its image in order to better seduce the Canadians and that it