

Supply—Justice

at this point because it expresses precisely what I think is important.

Dear Mr. Pearson,

You will recall that over the course of the last two or three years I have written to you personally about the urgent need for a special all-party parliamentary committee to review the constitutional issues facing Canada in the light of the threat to Canadian unity.

The tenor of your replies has been an approval of the proposal, linked with an expression of opinion that the time had not yet arrived to set up such a committee. Questions in the house put by myself and others have elicited a similar response from you.

I am encouraged by your words on the TV program "Twenty Million Questions" on September 27th, to raise the matter once again and to urge you that it is now both timely and imperative to appoint such a committee. The time has come to take the initial steps towards seeking a consensus from the elected representatives from all parties and regions on the main lines of an adequate federal response to the insistent demand for constitutional change.

In the interview you said that the current national unity crisis is a threat to the survival of Canada and you urged political parties to unite on basic objectives to meet the crisis and to form a common political front on national unity.

This is a laudable, indeed a highly important objective, but how can it be achieved unless the real problems that are involved are carefully looked at together by the representatives of the different parties? An all-party parliamentary committee would be the means whereby the basic issues could be clarified, and perhaps a consensus arrived at as to the changes necessary to meet the aspirations of French-speaking Canada without undermining the essentials of functioning federal systems.

I am certain you could count on such a committee to adopt a non-partisan approach on a matter so vital to Canada's future existence.

I know that you have said that it is necessary for your government first to formulate its own approach, and for that purpose to await the recommendations of special advisers appointed to the Department of Justice.

But I suggest there is no time to lose. Mr. Claude Ryan, in an admirable editorial in *Le Devoir* of the 26th of September, entitled "Les conditions d'une solution federale acceptable et durable", adopting the English expression, "Time is of the essence," has said that there is scarcely a moment to lose.

He adds "It is not excessive to affirm that there remains no more than a few years—two, three, or four at the most—to find the essential elements of a moderate solution to the "Canadian Problem".

Mr. Chairman, I believe that this parliament and the members of all parties have a part to play in finding these essential elements of a moderate solution which requires to be found, by Mr. Ryan's estimate, within two, three, or four years at the most.

[Mr. Brewin.]

I went on in my letter to the Prime Minister to say:

You have recently announced a proposal to discuss a constitutional bill of rights with the provincial premiers in November. May I urge that this proposal should be discussed with the House of Commons first, if you are truly serious about a non-partisan approach at the federal level to constitutional problems.

I urged that this proposal should be discussed in the House of Commons first, if the Prime Minister was serious about a non-partisan approach at the federal level in respect of constitutional problems. I will not read the rest of the letter but hon. members will see that it expresses what I am trying to say in the house to the Prime Minister, to the Minister of Justice and to his colleagues, that surely the time has come for the elected representatives of all regions of Canada to be given an opportunity to wrestle with these problems and to evolve if possible, and I believe it is, a consensus as to the federal point of view. It seems absolutely ridiculous that we have conferences called by provincial premiers and demands made by provinces, political parties and a key province in Canada, while at the same time we have no means in this parliament to dig into this problem in an attempt to deal with it.

In closing my remarks, I suggest to the Minister of Justice, that notwithstanding his other responsibilities of importance, such as the whole administration of justice, it is absolutely vital to the future of Canada that the elected representatives have a chance to look at this problem. I am sure they will do so in a non-partisan way so that we may contribute, not as a party or a group of parties, to the solution of the problems which the Prime Minister has said threaten the very existence of Canada. I ask the minister to state what is his position. I hope he agrees with the Prime Minister that even though the time is not exactly ripe, and perhaps we should wait until after the Ontario conference, the time is coming soon when the matter must and indeed should be dealt with by parliament. Anything less I suggest would create the danger of wrecking confederation, with the electing representatives having no chance to contribute their share to the solution of these grave problems.

Mr. Macquarrie: Mr. Chairman, for a good many years I have sat through the estimates of the Department of Justice without making any comment. Tonight my time is limited, my interest is great and my anxiety broad. I should like to begin by doing something I did