

Mr. Goodale: I apologize to the hon. member who has just spoken. I would not want to miss or to ignore her presence in this House. Indeed, as I pointed out in an interjection earlier in the debate, I think her contribution and her speech on this bill earlier today far outshone the rather petty contribution offered by her leader. I think she is to be congratulated for that. It might be that I overlooked the fact that she was here this evening because, during the course of my remarks, she was sitting there rather politely and, I hope, listening, while members around her were making it difficult for anyone to realize she was present.

● (2120)

In any event, Mr. Speaker, to conclude may I point out that the reaction of the gentlemen across the way—

An hon. Member: There, you said it again.

Mr. Goodale: I am sorry, I mean "gentlemen." The hon. lady reacted in a much different way. The reaction of hon. members, with the exception of the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), this evening is unfortunately all too typical of the things which so sadly and tragically contribute to the disunity of this country. I was hoping that the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar would offer some change in that. He made some remarks of substance toward the end of his speech, but I regret that he began with such a negative and cynical preamble when his remarks could otherwise have been helpful to the House.

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few comments on the bill, but first I should like to say that in my time in this House I have never witnessed twenty minutes of greater insecurity than has been exhibited by the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Goodale).

I should like to speak about the bill in general terms. The specifics have been dealt with by others, most notably the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald). The bill is really a fait accompli. We are debating something that we do not have much control over in this House other than to voice criticisms and concern. I should like to spend my time, as did the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Hnatyshyn), talking about Canada—what I think we should look to in Canada, and do it in as honest and in as non-partisan a manner as I can.

The problems of this country that people outside this chamber are talking about are very important to all of us. I think it is high time the House of Commons dealt with the central problem, that is, Canada vis-à-vis Quebec.

As an example, Mr. Speaker, Quebec has said she will boycott a federal-provincial communications conference this month. This is disturbing to most Canadians. A writer and historian of some note, Mr. Bruce Hutchinson, has said that Canada has entered the most dangerous and decisive years of its life. I believe that to be true. My great fear is that separation will come about unless we are prepared to make concessions and compromises.

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What can Canadians do? I suppose not too much individually, but collectively we can do a great deal. I firmly believe that the country still belongs to the people and not to the politicians. In fact the response from the rest of Canada will help determine how the people of Quebec will respond to the most important question in our history. As Canadians we can remain objective, cool of head and willing to explore all avenues open to us to have Quebec remain in Confederation. At the same time I think it can be a positive exercise because we can be taking the steps to form a new and even better country than we have had.

I think it should be clear that despite what the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), editorialists, and others have said—and this is my opinion—the question of Quebec will be decided in that province and not in the rest of the country. The unfortunate part, for a person viewing the situation outside the province of Quebec, is that the Quebec premier is at centre stage at the present time. He has it all to himself to espouse his particular theories. Premier Levesque will certainly make very forceful arguments for leaving Confederation. In my opinion the problem is that at this time there is no federalist Quebecer with equal status to challenge his arguments. The federalist argument for Quebec staying within Canada can be made equally as strong as those of the premier, in my opinion. At the present time there is a vacuum in Quebec, however, and people are not making that argument. The provincial Liberals are a spent force; they are leaderless and, to a certain extent, are without direction. The other major party, the Union Nationale, has experienced a certain upsurge of popularity but I do not think that will continue because I believe the base for its support, especially among the young people, may be too narrow.

As Canadians we must all start talking to the people of Quebec and not to the elected government of Quebec. I feel if we are to survive as a nation we will have to maintain the country as we presently know it. Canada can only be viable if that "sea to sea" concept brought about by the Fathers of Confederation some 110 years ago is kept foremost in our minds. It is time to stop hoping that the problems will resolve themselves. We see a lot of that in various parts of the country—the idea that if we do not look they will just go away. All of us in Canada must decide very quickly where we stand on the whole question of the Quebec-Canada confrontation.

The desire of French Canada to protect its own culture and way of life is not very different from the desire of the prairie farmer and the maritime fisherman to protect their unique communities, nor is it different from the desire of Canada's native peoples to protect their land and cultures. All these groups are threatened by powerful centralizing forces of the Canadian economy and by the prejudices of the Canadians. We need more understanding on the part of all Canadians if we are to preserve a united Canada. But understanding alone will not be enough to solve this problem. Governments, both federal and provincial, must actively resist the concentration of power and wealth in the centre. Canadians in general must be