

National Unity

[English]

We have a marvellous opportunity in this country. People outside this country look in wonder and amazement at a country which has so much in human and physical resources, and a long tradition in history and culture, but which is at the point of trying to decide whether it can continue as one country, whether it can survive. In one sense I suspect the election of November 15 was useful, for it made us much more conscious of what it is we are proud of in this country and what we are trying to create. We are reflecting in the present debate on this idea of one country. That idea of our country for us is one of two languages, two languages at the heart of that country, as a keystone for what we are doing. They should not be accepted as an unfortunate necessity and a temporary phenomenon, but as something as the heart of two countries—one country and two languages—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paproski: Two countries, that is right. You said it, John.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please.

Mr. Roberts: I did not mean that. I corrected myself immediately. We have one country, at the heart of which are two languages but many cultures.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. The hon. member's time has expired.

Mr. Malone: So, you believe in two countries.

Mr. Roberts: We believe in one country in which there are two languages and many cultures—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, that is for me a serious duty to take part in the debate on the motion put forward by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), which reads as follows:

That members of this House dedicate themselves anew to the continuing unity of Canada as a free and independent country organized on the basis of a federal form of government with two official languages and a diversity of cultures.

Mr. Speaker, in a few words, that motion sums up the whole history of our country, Canada, which was founded on the recognition of equal rights for two official languages, French and English, and of various cultures. The constitutional debate did not arise overnight, it is not likely to end tomorrow; however, during the last few years, a certain consciousness appeared and expressed itself in a real constitutional activity. This debate on Canadian harmony, by its nature, will show the need for Canadians like me to conceive a new constitution in

[Mr. Roberts.]

order to replace the existing one which is essentially a deal reached between two nations that founded our country.

Since 1760, Canada has experienced many constitutional changes. The first regular constitution, born of the British system, was the royal proclamation of October 7, 1763, effective August 10, 1764. It is at that time that New France was officially named the province of Quebec, but its territory was broken up later and King George III submitted the people to English law and abolished French law. In 1774, the Statute of Quebec recognized the French fact and re-established the French civil law, but the province was administered by London. Still the Statute of Quebec may be considered as the great charter of Canadian freedoms. Therefore, it is important that Canadians of 1977 be aware of the detailed events which have developed and which constitute the history of our country.

This constitution of 1774 raised the dissatisfaction of the English element, just as in 1977 there are some who challenge the reality of equal rights for the French-speaking and English-speaking people even if the number of citizens of either language is not equal. No wonder then that in 1977 many Canadians of either tongue want a new constitution, which would be better suited to the present time, because for the last 300 years our country has had several forms of constitution, but that did not check its growth and the fact that it has become an important nation whose reputation is well known at the international level.

In 1791, the new constitution had the effect of dividing the province of Quebec in two distinct governments, one for Higher Canada now known as the province of Ontario and the other, Lower Canada, that became the province of Quebec. Thus, this new constitution recognized the political existence by giving the colony a separatist constitution set up under the model of the British constitution of that time, and this constitution created the first legislative assembly. That was the beginning of our constitutional struggles.

In 1837, Canada was the scene of the patriots' uprising, which resulted in the Union Act of 1840. Later on, the delegates of both Upper and Lower Canada, together with those from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, took part in a conference in London which began in December 1866, and it is during this conference that a new constitution was adopted and received royal assent on July 1, 1867, a document which is known as the British North America Act. Then was born the federal government as we know it today. That is why we have every reason to say that the federal government was born from the will of the provinces and that it must still be subjected to the provinces and not become their master.

During the debate which took place before the adoption of the final constitution, two opposite approaches of the Canadian state had collided. Some, with Macdonald, were in favour of a single state in what they called at the time the legislative union of the provinces. Others, with Cartier and the French-Canadian delegates, were seeking a federal system which left a wide margin for self-government by the provinces. That formula was finally adopted, and it was recognized that French