

*National Unity*

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Fairweather:** I suppose almost all of us—at least we say all of us, I have heard it endlessly since November 15—say that we do not opt for the status quo. If we do not opt for the status quo and if we use logic—I know that is dangerous—then we need some new arrangement.

I am going to flatter myself and some others who suggested some new arrangements to the government and to parliament. We tabled those suggestions in this House five years ago. It is interesting to see some of the suggestions made by a former joint committee after its travels across the country now having the character of imprimatur on government departments and secretariats. I hope, as we reflect upon the new committee, that some of the things the former committee did will prove useful as a frame of reference. The recommendations of that joint committee are impressively current and imaginative. A new committee could use them as the basis for a fresh examination of the issue.

Saul Bellow wrote a book entitled "Journey to Jerusalem". He mentioned the preoccupation of Israel was survival. As an artist and writer he felt some alarm that a country he admires was committing itself so totally to survival that all the other essential components for Israel were lost sight of. Although we can thank God that Canada does not have external threats, we obviously have internal threats. I hope that national unity does not become such an oppressive preoccupation of government that all the other attributes of citizenship are lost sight of.

A week ago when I asked a minister about a certain policy direction—I do not doubt his motives—he replied that national unity was the preoccupation of his department and that the particular decision I referred to would have to wait. Other questions flow from that answer. I warn colleagues that it will not be useful for our countrymen to engage in this debate if it becomes an excuse for inactivity on the part of government. There is a danger to Canada in this preoccupation with the theme of national unity, the danger that the theme will be used as an excuse to postpone other essential decisions governments must make. I will not list them because we are under a time constraint, but other members have spoken of questions in the economic, social and cultural sphere which await government action.

● (2220)

As the cabinet chooses the direction we are to take as a country, I hope it will opt for a population vibrant and alive as it was ten years ago, vibrant and alive in the way my leader mentioned and in the way it was during the phenomenon of Expo in 1967 on our one hundredth birthday. That will be one of the tests of the government. I hope the criterion by which we measure this test will be much broader than the government's mere responsibility to maintain national unity.

I have another comment to make. I am worried by some of the inward-looking aspects of this debate. What are people in the world thinking about this country, as we go about this agony, as we expose ourselves and our agonies to the world?

[Mr. Fairweather.]

One wonders if it matters. Personally, I believe very much that this country's survival matters to the world outside Canada.

If I may say so without presumption, during my public career I have looked at the pluses of democracy, so to speak. I remember what happened as Greece overthrew the colonels. We have watched in the last few months a remarkable transformation in Spain. First there was a referendum, then we saw a democratically elected government. No voter under age 64 had ever voted before in Spain. I allude to those two examples, and to India. Actually we saw another example of the negation of the rule of law yesterday in another Commonwealth country. Therefore I say we in this country have a kinship with those in the world on the side of democratic institutions. Those people care how we arrange our institutions, how we respond to this country's challenges, to see if we can find a way, with mutual understanding and good will, to make what I used to call a precious experiment. Then a friend said precious is not a good enough word; we must call it a noble experiment, because this country, make no mistake about it, is a noble experiment in sharing.

One of the elements of federalism is the sharing of powers. Crude people call it sharing the pie. One could use other examples; I hope I am not offending anybody. Perhaps somebody in this debate has talked about sharing the pie. "Pie" is not a bad metaphor. It means the pie of Canada. But there is another essential element, reconciliation. George Woodcock spoke about it in his little book about Canada, written at the time of the centenary. He spoke of the two elements essential to the working of a federal system, sharing and reconciliation. I am sorry to say I have seen little evidence lately in this country of the ability to reconcile.

There are, by latest count, only a dozen or a dozen and a half federal systems in the world. Perhaps the experts can confirm my figures. Perhaps the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) can. I am not certain of my figures, but I do not suppose there are more than a dozen or 15 federal states in the world. Those of us who believe in the federal system have a tremendous responsibility to show the world that the system works and is the best system for a country of the size and diversity of this one where more than one language is spoken.

Let me end on this note. Surely the language aspect of this debate has been immensely complicated by the fact that many in this country have not yet accepted another language as a learning experience. To many people other languages have been associated with emotional experiences, presumably because of fear or threats, or because of insensitivity in the application of the Official Languages Act, as my leader said.

I do not suppose my short contribution will be remembered, but it is on record, and nobody can do anything about that. I make a plea for this noble experiment, almost unique in the world of federalism, this noble experience we share with only a dozen or so other states, and it is this: let us maintain the two essential elements of the experiment at all times. Let us not have one versus the other, but both. Let us foster the ability of governments and people to share and to reconcile, for if those elements are missing our unity is in trouble.