

greatest treasures any nation has ever known, our north? Obviously we cannot. Who was responsible, as one of his first acts in becoming Prime Minister, for cutting our NATO commitment in half, and who is responsible for and has presided over years and years of allowing our military capability to diminish? Certainly it is not our party or our leader. In fact, that has been the story of our country. If we do not pay attention to some of the things which involve meaningful sovereignty, we may get our Constitution home all right, but some day we may lose our independence. It is not that simple to bring home a statute without tending to the very fibre and the very basis of what a country should be.

Now the Constitution is being touted as a cure-all. In the midst of our current economic and regional struggles, which are more acute now than when the Prime Minister was first, or even more recently, elected, many people are understandably cynical about taking all this time at this point in our history to discuss and consider a Constitution which, in the opinions of many, has never been that much of a problem.

Some measure of past consistency of purpose and solid achievement in governing would have assisted the Prime Minister to lead and to achieve the trust that is necessary to do something as fundamental as changing a country's Constitution. I suppose what I am really saying is that people like to assess the track record before they place their bets. This government and this Prime Minister have not had much of a track record.

Even the Prime Minister's writings before he came into public life are suspect. Few people to my knowledge have said or written more derogatory things about the people in public life in his native province than has our Prime Minister in his salad days. In an essay, "Some obstacles to democracy in Quebec," published in the *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* and referred to in the book "Federalism and the French Canadians", the Prime Minister referred to the shameful incompetence of the average Liberal Member of Parliament from Quebec and said:

The party strategists had but to find an acceptable stable master—Laurier, Lapointe, St. Laurent—and the trained donkeys sitting in the back benches could be trusted to behave. Even the choice of front benchers very often smacked of shysterism.

That is despicable. I do not think anyone in this House believes that, but I wonder if the Prime Minister still holds those views. I hope not, but let me bring to the attention of my colleagues in the House a very interesting speech the Prime Minister gave on May 19, 1967 when he was parliamentary secretary to the then prime minister. He told a service club in the federal riding of Mount Royal:

Politicians who spend their time and energy complaining about the Constitution are simply trying to find excuses for not doing as good a job as they should. Canada's real problems are not constitutional ones but concern housing shortages, the cost of living and other serious problems.

Mr. Epp: Who said that?

Mr. MacKay: The Prime Minister. We know that in the meantime the problems about which the Prime Minister spoke in 1967 have not been solved but have become worse under the

pernicious inertia he has generated in this country. The Prime Minister went on to say on that same occasion in his riding:

Those who blame the Constitution for their troubles are deluding themselves in thinking that constitutional changes alone will work some kind of miracle on this continent.

Perhaps even then he was speaking with a "hell of a tongue in cheek", to quote him again more recently.

Don McGillivray, a very respected columnist, in the January 15 edition of the *Montreal Gazette*, again referred to the Prime Minister's more recent performance in a column entitled "Pierre is 0 for 5 on Promises". He wrote:

Trudeau said he would head a national government that uses its strength to realize the aspirations and economic potential of each of our provinces, it would be a national government that builds up rather than tears down, that would make the 1980s a decade of opportunity rather than a decade of doubt.

A year later, as Mr. McGillivray points out, the Trudeau government is almost at war with the provinces. I am not going to list the other failures Mr. McGillivray listed; they are there for all to read. But I do want to give the right hon. gentleman credit—and I mean this sincerely—for finally recognizing that our Supreme Court should have the opportunity to assess and to rule on our Constitution. To do otherwise would have been to deny not only fundamental justice but also to undo in a real way the historic work done in making our Supreme Court supreme in law in this country, taking away the umbilical cord which connected our legal system to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. That was a consistent and good thing to do, and I respect the Prime Minister for finally recognizing that fact.

The recognition of the rule of law rather than the experience and expedience of politics has changed, in my view, a great deal of the atmosphere in the House and the country. That is one improvement or concession which I think one should not be afraid to concede. It is something which transcends narrow, legal interpretation of any Constitution and goes to the soul of our nation.

However, there is another matter which I think is very, very important, and that is that it will be difficult for Canada to be a unified and developing nation when it is formally divided by our Constitution into different classes of provinces. Our neighbours to the south once had a great president, Abraham Lincoln, who at the time he was debating the issue of slavery said that, while he did not expect a nation divided would stand, he did not expect the union to fall either. He thought it would be one thing or the other, all slave or all free.

How can eight provinces in Canada feel that they have the dignity and status of full participation in a Canadian federation when they are formally subordinate to the Quebec-Ontario axis? I think hon. members will agree that it will be rather difficult and demeaning. Certainly it is not necessary. It is the perpetuation of existing bureaucratic and Liberal government thinking which pays lip service to federalism, as I said before, but really practises centralism. A good rallying cry for Canadians who are fed up, particularly those in the regions of the east and west, would be "federalism, yes; centralism, never".