

National Unity

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): The hon. member for Longueuil on a question of privilege.

Mr. Olivier: The hon. member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle) has just accused me of levelling accusations against him. I should like him to prove what he said, but he cannot. In view of his remarks, I ask the hon. member for Joliette to withdraw the statement he has just made, unless he can prove it is true.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): I suggest this is a point of debate not a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. La Salle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, the Quebec situation results from the fact that Quebec representatives within the federal government have not fulfilled their duties. Over the past ten years, the right hon. Prime Minister and his Quebec colleagues have chosen to hide the truth from their cabinet colleagues from the other provinces by not telling them what was really going on in the province of Quebec. I remember that . . .

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired.

Mr. Grafftey: Continue!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): I believe there was an understanding that all leaders would get 40 minutes and that other members would get 20 minutes, so I am trying to divide the remaining time fairly.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I regret having to open my remarks this afternoon by saying something I did not expect to say, and in a tone I had not intended to use. I want to say I regret very deeply, as I am sure, does my party, the insensitivity of the government toward this issue. We are in the middle of a debate on national unity. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie) has taken this occasion to demonstrate his insensitivity, his disregard for the history and traditions both of the country and of parliament.

I will continue, but perhaps because of my advancing age I find difficulty in overcoming a loud babble of other voices.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Don't let either of those things bother you.

Mr. Brewin: I want to express the feelings which I believe are held by many Canadians across this land, feeling of passionate concern for the maintenance and development of a strong, federally-united Canada. This would not be the achievement of one man or of one party but of very many Canadians.

It is the particular responsibility of parliament, working through its elected representatives, to lead the way. I am not sure that a formal committee is the best way of doing this. I was a member of the Joint Committee on the Constitution and, as I recall only too well, that committee came up with some 202 recommendations and, to the best of my knowledge, not a single one of them was ever carried out. I would not want

[Mr. Olivier.]

any further committee to have such an experience. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), or the government, should at least prepare and present to parliament its proposals, albeit in outline, for the unity of Canada. Eight months have now gone by since the election of November 15 and we have yet to hear in this parliament any concrete proposal about what should be done to change the system.

I welcome very strongly the decision of the recent convention of my party in Winnipeg, under the effective leadership of my hon. friend from Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent), because it stresses the need for national priorities and national political leadership, emphasizing that economic and egalitarian changes make an essential contribution to Canadian unity. We must establish a national planning and investment strategy and commit our country to full employment. Our key national goal should be political and economic independence.

Canada has an important role to play in the world of nations by constructing a new economic order which would tackle the immense problem of poverty throughout the world. She could play this role if united and independent. We must recognize the basic human needs for housing, food and energy at reasonable prices, and access to health care as a social right. To achieve an equitable redistribution we must reshape our taxation system. However, important economic policies are not the sole means of achieving a united Canada. We must make it clear to French Canada, and particularly the province of Quebec, that we recognize and admire the wonderful and attractive culture which is theirs, and are prepared to do everything we can to see that it is protected and maintained. We must also make it clear that although Quebec has the right to make its own choice without coercion, we strongly support a federal Canada and believe that a majority of the people of Quebec will decide to remain in Canada.

While it is true that the federal parliament must have full authority to deal with external affairs, banking and other economic matters if it is to maintain equality of standards across Canada, we do believe that increased administrative authority can be devolved to the provinces and that this can be done in such a way as to maintain a fair balance between the federal and provincial governments. This is not a request for general decentralization, because if we carry on a process of decentralization we shall find before long that the federal government does not have sufficient remaining powers to enable it to carry out its tasks. That is a real danger if we pursue the role of decentralization too far.

● (1750)

I am one of those, Mr. Speaker, who believes that we need a new constitution. I do not think that constitutional change in itself is the answer to all our problems, but just think for a moment about what is our constitution. We have an ancient British statute which is obviously completely lacking any sort of emotional appeal to modern Canadians. A constitution is necessary in a federal state not only to clarify the division of powers but, perhaps even more important, to provide an