

The Constitution

their opinion and I hope it will serve a purpose when the time comes to finalize the report. The Castonguay-Dobbie committee was also established. But as you know, Senator Castonguay resigned because, as we have seen later on, he was against the federal government's proposals, particularly the Canadian economic plan. He clearly said so a few days ago. Hence he was replaced by Senator Beaudoin.

As this did not work very well, the Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs decided to hold constitutional conferences which are mostly made up of people who want to renew Canada. In the invitations, mention was made that the purpose was to renew Canada. We have completely forgotten that in Canada there are more than 3 million Quebecers in favour of sovereignty. We have completely neglected to ask for their opinion. Quebec made sure that federalists were represented on the Bélanger-Campeau commission, but the federal government refused to hear sovereignists, even though they number more than three million in Quebec.

Will Canadian men and women understand the reality of Canada? I do not think so. The fact that the federal government refuses to hear Quebec sovereignists in this consultation process prevents Canadians from understanding that francophones are part of the Canadian reality. They are not an ethnic group, they are a nation. Quebecers represent a nation and never in this whole federal process did the government give English Canadians an opportunity to understand what Quebec is. Quebec is a nation; it is not an important ethnic group in Canada. Yet that is what Italians and other newly arrived ethnic groups believe. They believe that Quebecers are an important ethnic group. I think we should perhaps remind them of the history of Canada.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about the distinct society. Some people want Canadians to believe that the distinct society concept is limited to language and culture. It is not limited to language and culture, and I mean culture in the proper sense of the word.

• (1950)

Quebec's distinct society includes all our financial institutions, such as the Caisse de dépôt, Desjardins, our

trust and insurance companies, and our small businesses. All these economic features set Quebec apart from the rest of Canada. Some people want us to believe that our distinct society is based solely on language and culture, in the strict sense of the terms, but that is not so. Quebecers also wish to protect and promote their economic characteristics.

That is why Quebecers will never accept that their economy be managed out of Ottawa. We will never accept such a thing, and I think several people got the message.

So if they try to delude us into believing English Canada is starting to understand how important it is to recognize our distinct society, it might be because they simply do not understand what Quebec means by "distinct society".

I see my time is running out. I just want to add that we can hardly wait for the federal government proposals. We are anxious to have this constitutional problem resolved so that we can undertake economic projects aimed at promoting Quebec's economy in particular.

[English]

Mr. J. W. Bud Bird (Fredericton—York—Sunbury): Madam Speaker, it is with a great sense of pride and opportunity that I participate in this debate this evening and to tell this House, on behalf of the constituents of my riding of Fredericton—York—Sunbury, about their views, about the consultations we have had with respect to the constitutional proposals and to deliver the promise which I made as I commenced the consultations in my riding several months ago.

I would like to say that over the past many weeks in a number of ways I have had the opportunity to consult with my constituents at public meetings held almost every month, at citizens' committees which met on regular occasions and in the normal course of interchange in our constituency: at the market, on the street, by phone, by letter and in personal conversation. My message was generally always the same, that I came to my constituents with a sense of pride and responsibility as their member of Parliament, available to talk with and listen to any individual or group of constituents having a