

*The Constitution*

in his constitutional proposal and justifies his move by the need to positively affirm the supremacy of the people in the enjoyment of their fundamental rights and assert our national autonomy in our statutes. This move which is in keeping with its underlying symbols and which all Canadian men and women should greet with pride and enthusiasm, having regard to our maturity as a nation, causes only resentment, anathema and what is worse, indifference among those towards whom it is directed.

How could this happen? As a great many other Canadians, I keep asking myself this question with nagging insistence and I formulate it at the start of my intervention in this debate which could have provided not only a futile consolation for our upside-down history, but an opportunity for mutual comprehension to those who still believe in tolerance and our collective destiny. Alas! because of the dichotomy created by a concealed antagonism and two opposite visions of our country, as well as the hardening of positions along party lines, the present debate has bogged down in abstruse rhetoric, which is both unfortunate and revealing at the same time.

First proposition. We must realize that past attempts at amending the Constitution by time-honoured methods have failed. Again, how could that have happened, Mr. Speaker? On the one hand, I think that we must definitely impute part of the blame on the protagonists themselves who, for all sorts of reasons, have been unable or unwilling to bridge the enormous gap created by partisanship, regionalism, sectarianism, distrust, mental fatigue, immobilism, egotism and egocentrism.

But in so doing, I feel we would be unfair toward those men. There is not a single woman in the lot of them, who have tried nevertheless to answer the difficult question which we ourselves, as legislators, have to discuss in the course of this debate. I feel part of the blame should also be put on those very institutions that have been used, of which the privileged and typically Canadian vehicle of the federal-provincial conferences, in an effort to reach a consensus. That mere word consensus, Mr. Speaker, sums up the dilemma we face. For, as far as I am concerned, the rule of consensus is precisely one of the main reasons why we are discussing this resolution today, a resolution that sanctions the unilateral vision of the constitutional reform, which the Canadian government decided to bring before us.

Some have suggested methods to better achieve what must be done. There has been talk of constituent assemblies, and I must say the concept really appeals to me in that I find it attractive and sparkling, that of a constituent assembly where persons elected for that specific purpose would, by virtue of their mandate, make a new Constitution, leaving it to the elected representatives to look after the nation's business. However, the problems of setting up a constituent assembly remain the same, in the final analysis, as those we have to solve today. And as things stand at present, I unfortunately no longer feel that the concept of a constituent assembly is that

miracle cure, the panacea to all our ills, the ideal system through which we could solve all our problems.

Others have suggested other techniques, that of a standing, so to speak, provincial conference on the Constitution. The introduction in the constitutional resolution for the next two years of the concept of an annual federal-provincial conference could have been that constitutional entrenchment of the principle; for my part, Mr. Speaker, I would rather a time limit had not been set for that concept, that is, the principle of an annual federal-provincial conference on the Constitution, but that instead it be incorporated into our institutions, our textbooks, even though I may be accused of being slightly masochistic in my approach, since discussing the Constitution annually might be to entrench forever the melancholy constitutional mood of Canadians.

Second proposition. The unilateralism of that process and the temporary sanction of a certain vision of federalism. The federalism of seniority which the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) referred to in a brilliant and pithy account coming from a man who in this debate cannot be accused of not having been through the ranks, deserves to be read and reread, analysed, digested and finally, to my mind, accepted inasmuch as that federalism of seniority under which this constitutional resolution is being presented is the only justification for the steps being taken or suggested by the government today.

Now, if it were only a matter of federalism of seniority, I would sit down immediately, and the answer would be obvious to me: I would have to vote no. But the problem is more complex. Indeed, as long as we have not determined, as Canadians, the respective balance offered by those two concepts, those two visions of Canada, that on the one hand, of the pan-Canadian federalism, the federalism of seniority which is that of the Right Hon. Prime Minister and others, and on the other hand, the federalism based on a community of communities of which the provinces are the main protagonists, and which the Progressive Conservative Party espoused in this House and also champions, then I feel it will be next to impossible to solve our constitutional problems once and for all.

● (1500)

On the other hand, if we realize as I do, all things considered, the failure of that pathetic contest last September, of that battle of leaders trying before us or before the television cameras to answer those same questions, as long as that problem is not solved, it will remain for me a constitutional status quo.

We are therefore facing an alternative which is not really one. The failure of September establishes the status quo for all practical purposes—and I will come back to that—namely, that we are ratifying a constitutional bid for power in the name of principles which may be tangent in many respects but which give us some hope of a breakthrough. However, I would