

too often and whether it is not the proper time to give the provinces a role which so far has been consistently denied by the federal government. For example, for how many years now, I do not know, we have been facing two problems—underemployment and inflation. Ottawa did take a lot of initiatives to cope with this, yet nobody could say that it has fully succeeded.

Would it not be better, Mr. Speaker, if the federal government, through fiscal and economic legislation, merely established a kind of common denominator from which a provincial policy, more attuned to local economic conditions, could be developed? Thus the provinces and consequently all Canada could stand a better chance of successfully tackling either inflation or underemployment, according to which is the more directly affecting them. However, to avoid the confusion which could result from ill-concerted initiatives, I think the Canadian confederation has to find new structures which could lead to this kind of federalism of consultation I was referring to.

I want to make it quite clear, Mr. Speaker, I am not in the least advocating breaking up our country as a prerequisite for renegotiating new conditions of association between its various components. During its hundred years of existence, the Canadian confederation has proven that it can meet the legitimate aspirations of each province and of each of its founding people. Therefore, the renegotiation of a new constitution must be conducted within the present framework of this country. As former premier Daniel Johnson said one day with humour, why divorce to go into a new partnership without knowing whether the other partner would still want to do so under the same conditions? Since in the spirit of 1867 Canada was also an economic union, can we not imagine, for instance, a national planning council whose role could be inspired by that of the European Economic Community Council.

● (1600)

This council could operate through commissions copied on the European model. It would remain then to define the type of representation for the various governments and the nature of the powers conferred on the new council. However, it would be desirable for a government to be represented by permanent delegates who would be commissioned to enter into contracts on behalf of their agents. Today, I shall simply launch this idea. It could allow us to find a durable solution to our present problems by assigning to each government level the role to which it is most suited.

I have talked about economic planning. There are other sectors where national commissions like the one I have just mentioned could advantageously replace the often sporadic meetings of ministerial conferences. Commissions could operate in other sectors, like agriculture, manpower, immigration, housing, regional development and so on. They would establish national priorities in each of those areas and would suggest them to the political authorities. I am not saying that discussions within the commissions would not sometimes be arduous and that all conflicts would be avoided, but I believe that such commissions would have a better chance of avoiding the

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tensions and crises which we have too often witnessed these last few years.

A truly national policy born of a consensus among all governments would, I believe, have a better chance of being accepted by the whole population because it would be more able to meet the objectives and priorities of each part of Canada. If we had such a council, we would probably have been able to offer better protection to several of our industries which are now threatened, and I am thinking about textiles, shoes, dairying and so on. We would have been less exposed to criticisms on the part of the areas whose interests were messed about or even sacrificed. We would probably have given our common development more coherence, more continuity, and we would have avoided many costly improvisations. At any rate, one thing seems sure: we would have better respected one of the objectives of the Fathers of Confederation, the economic union which led to the British North America Act. What the countries of the European Economic Community are now doing, their parallel economies, their various interests, and for some, the settling of their historical enmities, why should we, Canadians, who have been associated for more than a century in a country as big and as varied as a whole continent, why should we not be able to do?

But to do so, we must be firmly convinced of the need to separate decision-making centres and to modify consequently this constitution which no longer completely meets the needs of a modern Canada. Because it does not have a past full of mistakes, because it is the direct descendent of those who made this country, because it has always believed in a better distributed authority, the Progressive Conservative party is better placed than any other to preside at changes which are now needed urgently to save Canada from latent disintegration. Mr. Speaker, I know that following the verdict given November 15 last in Quebec, the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) says that he is now ready to start again the dialogue interrupted in Victoria, to re-assess everything and to amend if need be the constitution in its entirety.

I would certainly believe in his conversion if in the same breath the head of the government did not declare publicly his skepticism about the chances of that kind of endeavour and if he stopped praising the merits of policies which no longer satisfy anyone and in which he alone believes. He would still have my confidence if he did not despise so much what he contemptuously calls the "constitutionality" and if he did not ignore the concerns of so many Canadians asking for a new constitution with more definite powers and responsibilities for each level of government. However I would not like Canadians to delude themselves and believe that minor economic or administrative reforms will neutralize all the pressures threatening the unity of our country. In Quebec, for instance, the concept of independence originated from other concerns. The Parti Québécois exists because, for a nation that has reached its full maturity, independence is a normal objective.

The exciting desire to live freely is not illegitimate as such. So it is by a continuous effort of reflexion and also a reflex of prudence but mostly a deep attachment for a country where