

National Unity

day by day that have been brought on to a great degree by the events of November 15 last. In many respects these economic problems are bound to spill over provincial borders and have a profound effect on Canada as a whole.

● (2010)

The majority of the people of Quebec, as best I can determine, are not in favour of secession from Confederation. However, they are determined to bring an end to the second-class citizen status placed upon them by the majority of Canadians. To this end they have improved their quality of education and are today turning out science and commerce graduates that are capable of standing shoulder to shoulder with any Anglophone Canadian graduate from across the country.

The Francophone Canadian is a very proud individual. He is a different person than his parents and grandparents. He harbours desires for success and the amenities of life the same as all of us and is prepared to make the sacrifices to achieve them. His only reservation is that he wants to do it in his language of thought and not be compelled to carry on a full time translation process in order to get his point across.

I can sympathize with this desire as could any Anglophone who would take the opportunity to live for a period of time in Quebec. Language however has been at the root of many problems in the history of the world and possibly because we are such a young country we must make our own mistakes.

My wife and I—

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

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, nine years after the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) formed his first administration, almost eight months after a separatist government is elected to office in the province of Quebec, members of the House of Commons are finally accorded a two day debate on national unity. For this debate the government presents a resolution in which members are asked to dedicate themselves anew to the continuing unity of Canada. Some of us, indeed the majority of us, dedicate ourselves anew to this country each day we enter this Chamber. We do not need a prolonged debate to do that, but two days is pitifully short to explore the reasons for the deep divisions and conflicts in this country, and to put forward proposals as to how they can be met and resolved.

The resolution itself reveals a very simplistic approach to the issue of national unity. Since last November 15 we have been exhorted, or we have exhorted others, to stand up and proclaim how much we love our country. But words, however fervently spoken, are no longer enough. The Canadian people have passed through that phase since November 15. Yes, we can all be and are missionaries in the cause of national unity, as the Prime Minister urged this afternoon. But surely it is not necessary for any of us in this Chamber to reiterate our feelings about Canada. We know how deeply we feel, and through our actions we try to show it with every passing day.

What this country does not need, and does not want, is a Charles de Gaulle approach. It would be an affront to Canada, to Canada's history and to Canada's people, for any individual to try to pass himself off as the incarnation of the country or the saviour of the country.

The Prime Minister has said again and again that will and determination will carry us through. But will and determination, unless channelled into some meaningful forum, cannot in themselves resolve the crisis this country faces today. Canadi-

[Mr. Milne.]

ans are looking for a forum, an agenda, or a plan of action in which they can participate on a continuing basis in this emergency. But they do not have such a forum because the people's representatives—the duly elected members of parliament—do not have such a forum, except for a limited two day debate on a resolution couched in platitudes.

The Canadian people are entitled through their elected representatives to participate in deciding what form their future will take, and surely the best framework for this task is a parliamentary committee, as my leader has proposed. The failure of the Prime Minister to recognize this fundamental truth makes me wonder if he would not deliberately reject this idea for his own personal aggrandizement. He was asked last April to establish a special parliamentary committee to deal with the problems in our federal system. He said he would discuss the suggestion with the government House leader. The House leaders subsequently did discuss such a move, and I can only surmise that the reason a special parliamentary committee on national unity is not being proposed by the government at this time is that the Prime Minister vetoed it.

Civic-minded groups all across the country are setting up committees to discuss ways to rectify the country's current malaise. Can the House of Commons, the most representative forum of the people, do less than that?

Let us take a look at what the government has done in these last few months since the election of a separatist government in Quebec. Faced with the most serious challenge to Confederation in our history, members of the government did what they do with any other problem. They created a new secretariat in the bureaucracy. They realized there was something very special about this problem, so they appointed two secretariats. The secretariats have swung into action collecting newspaper clippings, running Pequist economic pronouncements through a computer and, of course, co-ordinating each other's work. Their multicoloured flow charts, their computers, their analyses—everything is in perpetual motion inputting to Canada's very first programmed Prime Minister.

Today we have the appointment of a special blue ribbon commission. As worth-while as the operations of that group might be, it is yet one further example of the contempt the Prime Minister has for the relevancy of this institution. For parliament to take this lying down would surely be the ultimate abdication of its responsibility. These are eminent Canadians whom the government proposes to appoint; but they do not have the mandate that we have as members of parliament, the one institution chosen by all Canadians. The challenge that faces parliament in this year 1977 is not one that can be delegated to any outside commission, no matter how eminent.

The Prime Minister might just learn something from history. I ask him to cast his mind back to the difficulties of 1864, when the union of Upper and Lower Canada ran into grave problems. It was all too evident that the system was not working. Did the political leaders of that day send for an architect of an earlier time to help devise a remedy? Had the