

Mr. Trudeau went to Bonn and on his way back he announced an economic and administrative program that had all the makings of an electoral platform for the coming fall. If this was not the case, you must readily admit at least implicitly if not openly, the program would have been announced in the Throne Speech of a session that could have started a number of weeks ago.

Then came another poll, in late August or early September, and the Liberal prospects became more dismal still. Once more the election was postponed and this time as it should, if anything goes as it should with this government, to the spring of 1979.

The Prime Minister who, on March 1, 1978, had announced for October 16 a number of by-elections which had made everybody laugh at the time since, evidently, they were to be preceded by a general election because of the time lapse between the announcement date and the expected date, that is, 7½ months later, decided early in September to add some other by-elections.

He was looking for some sort of more precise opinion poll in typical areas of Canada, especially Toronto. Of course, Toronto was a trouble spot for the government. We know the result. Interviewed last night, the Prime Minister stated he will spend the next six months convincing the people that his leadership is needed, that the measures he is now proposing are effective, in the belief clearly stated indeed by the government leader earlier that the Liberal Party is the only one capable of saving and managing Canada.

If, in the spring of 1979, public opinion should still be against him, can we not believe that he could prolong the delay and put back the date of the elections until the fall of 1979 since, technically, he is entitled to do so. Moreover, by carrying this joke as far as it will go, and since this Parliament can go on until July 31, 1979, there is nothing to force the Prime Minister to call elections since he only has to ensure that a new Parliament will be elected during the year so that there will be a new session within one year of the session which has just begun, and we could therefore have general elections only in the summer of 1980.

There is no doubt that the Prime Minister has abused his discretionary power—and I should say his overly discretionary power—to call elections when he feels like it. He has kept Canadians on tenterhooks for so long that they have seized the first opportunity to let him know that they do not appreciate an attitude which virtually equals contempt towards them.

In passing, this discretionary power of the Prime Minister to call elections should certainly be examined, and restricted if need be, while we are studying proposals for a new Constitution.

I have just talked about the attitude of the government towards the general public.

The successive postponements of general elections are an insult not only for the population but also for Parliament. How can Parliament, and especially the House of Commons, operate with this sword of Damocles hanging over its head?

We must admit that the Prime Minister has never shown much admiration or understanding for the House. He does not really appreciate debate. Members of Parliament, as indeed any opposition to his views, often make him lose patience. The announcement of his economic program on his return from Bonn, which should have been made in a Speech from the Throne and before Parliament, also shows what little respect he has for this institution. As for his views about the Senate, I shall come back to this later on.

At this stage, there is no need to do anything more to convince you that he is not very interested, or at least favourably impressed, by what goes on in this assembly.

[English]

Honourable senators, I have given my analysis of the attitude of the government toward the population and Parliament—an attitude which I can only describe as sheer contempt. Let us look at the way in which the government has dealt with the question of a new Constitution for Canada. As I mentioned, the government, at the beginning of June, tabled its white paper entitled *A Time for Action: Toward the Renewal of the Canadian Federation*; and introduced Bill C-60.

A time for action! Was it really a time for action with a general election looming on the horizon? Was it a time for action given a government then four years old? More particularly, was it the way to act for the government to say that it intended to proceed unilaterally on Phase I, setting as a deadline July 1, 1979? Was it a way to act when, on Phase II, it also threatened to proceed unilaterally if no agreement were reached with the provinces by July 1981?

Perhaps honourable senators will ask where I find this intention. Clause 125 of the bill, and others following, set out that the mere adoption of Bill C-60 would constitute an Address to Westminster to pass legislation bringing Phase II into force and patriating the Constitution, even with no amending formula having been agreed upon and without any agreement on the part of the provinces.

● (2030)

Of course, the joint committee was quick to point out that legally it was very doubtful whether Parliament had the right to move unilaterally on Phase I, and the government was forced to refer the matter to the Supreme Court.

But even if the Supreme Court were to rule that the government was right on a legal basis, the intention to proceed unilaterally was extremely dangerous on the political level, as was shown by the unanimous protest of the premiers in Regina.

The debate on this question has forced the government to back away from its original plan of action, and the Speech from the Throne now speaks of a revised bill and speaks of goodwill and flexibility on all sides—and when it says “on all sides” I suppose that would include its own side.

The government is now apparently prepared to wait, before introducing constitutional proposals, for the outcome of the scheduled conference of first ministers, and even for a report