

The Constitution

● (1940)

That Canada's legislators do their utmost to ensure a speedy and efficient discussion aimed at identifying issues clearly, before amending a constitution which, on the whole, has served the interests of the Canadian people very well.

Mr. Speaker, the decision by some of the provinces to refer our proposal to the courts hardly meets this call from an important segment of Canadian society for a "speedy and efficient discussion".

As the Attorney General of Ontario has pointed out, the current constitutional issue is a political, not a legal issue.

The Chamber of Commerce's submission indicates support for a federal power sufficient to ensure the free circulation of goods and services, labour, and capital across the country, to the end that all Canadians will be dealt with and treated equitably wherever they may be in Canada.

I was happy to see that Mr. Sam Hughes, president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, applauded the charter of rights in our proposed resolution guaranteeing free movement of labour within the country. I share his sentiment that it would have been preferable to expand this concept of a Canadian common market to include the free movement of capital, goods and services, but I reiterate the Prime Minister's statement that our proposals are only the first sensible step to renew our unity and revive our nationhood.

The chamber's submission also calls for ongoing formal consultation between the federal government and the provinces to co-ordinate trade and other initiatives abroad better while speaking with one voice in international affairs.

As I have pointed out, Mr. Speaker, the resolution before us contemplates the ongoing discussions between the two levels of government as witnessed by section 32.

It was particularly gratifying to see a proposal from the Chamber of Commerce relating to the maintenance of a system of transfer payments designed to ensure the availability of basic services in all regions of Canada. This has been touched upon by other hon. members this evening.

This is enshrined in our proposed resolution in section 31 through the principle of equalization, which commits the Government of Canada and the provincial governments to promote equal opportunities for the well-being of all Canadians, to further economic development, to reduce disparity in opportunities, and to provide essential public services of reasonable quality to all Canadians.

I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I did not mention that the submission by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce contains recommendations which do not necessarily coincide with the total philosophy of this government. But, as has been indicated by hon. members who have spoken previously, once the resolution is referred to committee and the opportunity is made available for in-depth consideration, then we feel there will be an opportunity for a genuine exchange of opinions. That is the appropriate place for it, Mr. Speaker.

Another voice heard on the constitutional issue was that of the Business Council on National Issues, an association of the chief executive officers of some 140 major corporations across

Canada. In a letter to the Prime Minister dated September 2, 1980, the Council expressed the view that governments should be restrained by the constitution from adopting legislation or regulations that would have the effect of restricting, again, the mobility of persons in pursuit of a legitimate livelihood; or of unjustly depriving a person of the rights of ownership; or of limiting a person's right to have, where numbers warrant, access to government services in either official language.

The letter also states, and I quote:

We do not underestimate the difficulty of achieving a new constitutional understanding in a country as vast and complex as Canada, but we believe that the time for accommodation is overdue.

We want to convey to you the sense of urgency and concern that we share, concern that a continued lack of resolution of constitutional issues will in the future, as it has in the past, cause us to lose opportunities for investment and jobs.

Decisions have not been taken, investments not made, jobs not created, because of the uncertainty and unpredictability of the economic climate in Canada.

That is the business community addressing every member of the House, Mr. Speaker.

In a recent address the Canadian Manufacturers' Association president, Mr. J. E. Newall, said that the prime role of the business sector—to produce goods and services in the most efficient and productive way possible—was being adversely affected by a growing fragmentation of the Canadian common market and by the delays and uncertainties caused by the seemingly endless debate on the division of economic powers between the central government and the provinces.

As Mr. Newall put it:

One critical objective of constitutional reform should be to strengthen Canada's common market. The provincial preferences may, when considered individually and in isolation, give the appearance of provincial benefits. However, all produce national inefficiencies. They produce retaliation from other provinces.

Earlier in my comments about the inscription on the Peace Tower, Mr. Speaker, I referred to our resolution as a vision of what Canada can be once we have embraced the principle of self-determination in its entirety. In some ways, the conference of first ministers offered the premiers a chance to be visionaries, but they rejected it.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members present in this House, the Canadian business community, and all Canadians, if they share that vision of our Canada, to show their support, and join in supporting the government in its resolution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss Pat Carney (Vancouver Centre): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity that I have had to speak as the member of Parliament for Vancouver Centre. It is the custom of this House that, under these circumstances, new members describe for the record the constituency which they have the honour to represent. Today I am forced to forgo this tradition because I speak under the guillotine of closure. I speak under the constraints of limited debate imposed by the Government of Canada.

The people of Vancouver Centre will remember that. They are Canadians who come from a rich and diversified back-