

*The Constitution*

• (2040)

Interestingly enough, he is a new Canadian, having achieved his Canadian citizenship in 1967. In his opening comments he said: "I think Canada is the number one place to be", which set the stage for the evening.

There were some general impressions which I would like to report to the House at this time. First of all, we thought we might get somewhere between 30, 40 or 50 people to that meeting. Instead we had a full house of somewhere over 130 people. There was standing room only in the room that we had acquired for that purpose. These people included students and senior citizens, business leaders, labour leaders, farmers, housewives, professionals, a cross-section of our society in our area.

I have to report also that there was an obvious sense of change in the mood, which we see across the country as well. People were softening from some of their hard positions. There was a willingness to compromise and to recognize the distinct nature of the Quebec society and so on. Without a doubt, the majority of those who were in attendance wanted to see Quebec stay in Confederation.

Just a word about who spoke and what they had to say at that meeting. Let me begin by repeating for you what Susan de Ryke, who was reporting for the *Woodstock Daily Sentinel Review*, said as she observed about how the meeting went. She said: "They spoke from prepared speeches, notes jotted down on envelopes and from the heart." That sort of gave you a good feeling of how people approached the subject.

Many issues were touched upon, a few of which were somewhat remote to the constitutional subject at hand, but one expected that to happen. Virtually everybody who attended that meeting was able to speak. In fact, 29 did speak and the meeting went on until nobody else indicated that they wanted to say a few words. The meeting went on for somewhere over two hours.

Bob White, whom I mentioned before, is the president of the Chamber of Commerce and also a lawyer. When he gave his remarks he said: "You fear what you do not know and we do not know Quebec". I think he expressed the views that we have come to realize, that when you do not know about something, you do not know about a people, you have reservations and apprehensions. I think those are beginning to break down as we hear each other talk more and more.

One gentleman who spoke was Mr. Earl Shea who was born in Quebec and married a French speaking girl whose history goes back to 1556 in Quebec. He is a local businessman in Woodstock. He is also the past president

of the Woodstock Business Improvement Association and he is currently the president of the Rotary Club of Woodstock. He felt that there was a real need to keep Canada together, that there was a need to understand each other, and that those are some of the requirements of having the kind of unity that we want to have.

Another interesting speaker among the 29 was Mr. Les Cook, a retired postal worker and a former mayor of the city of Woodstock. He thought some of the malaise in the country with respect to the Constitution was probably due to the lack of confidence in both levels of government brought on by a weakening of some of our traditional values. He went on to say: "No one has the right to advocate break-up of their country".

Joan Denew, president of the National Council of Women in Canada, with a long history in this country, expressed some concern that Canadian women are worried about the fate of their social programs, and that was a comment we heard from two or three people.

A number of the witnesses wanted recognition of the rights of self-government for our aboriginal community. Matthew White who is a part-time student said: "I just don't think natives are getting a fair shake in Canada". He also agreed with the need to recognize the distinct society in Quebec.

A small number of people expressed concern about official bilingualism and the sign law. Within a large group we can expect to have a few that indicate those concerns as well.

With respect to the Senate there were a lot of views brought to the meeting regarding how the Senate should be changed, reforms in the Senate. The odd person wanted to have it abolished. Some wanted special seats for the aboriginals. Others wanted special seats for certain groups of people, sectors of society. I felt very sympathetic myself with David Irving of the town of Norwich who expressed the fact that we needed to have regional representation in the House. Personally I would support that.

Indeed I am a bit of a maverick. I would feel that we should keep the Senate the way it is now, only have it more regionally represented but by appointment so we have representation from all political parties that are governing in the provinces. At one time a few years back we had five different political parties in power in the provinces, only two of which were represented in the House of Commons.

We also heard from Graham Hart, a leader in the agricultural community. He expressed some disappointment in the fact that the Meech Lake Accord was not adopted. He wants to see us go ahead and not be