

We have been subjected in recent days to a shock of a different nature in terms of the report submitted by the Economic Council of Canada. The low standard of living of a large portion of our population surely calls for profound study.

[Translation]

We, twenty million Canadians, can hardly boast of the vast natural resources by which Divine Providence blessed our country, as long as a substantial proportion of our fellow-citizens spend their lives in the shadow of poverty and despair.

[English]

The report suggests that this chamber could well be used as the instrument for a study of the root causes of this problem, and for the formulation of remedial policies for submission to the proper executive authority. Honourable senators are aware, of course, that the present Government is giving serious consideration to this whole subject matter, and I am sure that this house would want the honourable Leader of the Government (Hon. Mr. Martin) to inform his colleagues of our appreciation of our responsibilities and of our desire to co-operate in every way possible.

I have alluded to the subject matter of national unity. Born and reared as I have been in the Province of Quebec, I am extremely responsive to the legitimate aspirations of the predominant majority in my province.

Having regard to my membership in a so-called minority of minorities, I must, however, with emphasis, draw the attention of honourable senators to the fact that there are millions of Canadians in this country who are not classified as belonging to the so-called two founding races. I should like to record the views of this important grouping that in the pluralistic mosaic of Canada the aspirations and ambitions of all Canadians must be placed on an equal footing. This is not by way of suggesting any delimitation or restriction to the legitimate constitutional and historic rights of the two great races that assisted in founding this country.

[Translation]

National unity will not exist within our country and, as a nation, our destiny will remain unachieved until such time as the word "Canadian" means, for all Canadians, the sum total of the rights, privileges, duties

and obligations which every citizen of this country enjoys and shares equally, from sea to sea, regardless of his ethnic origin or religion.

[English]

During the last election campaign we heard a great deal about Senate reform.

We are living in a country where universal suffrage has changed the character of our parliamentary institutions and of the executive branch of government. The legitimate but, on occasion, strident demands of the social welfare state expressed through its citizenry has resulted in the evolution of governmental institutions now under the control of the executive and administrative branches of our federal Government.

This in itself is not an evil, provided that there are necessary corrective forces to see that authority does not lead to abuse, and abuse to indifference to the public welfare. In this respect the judiciary can play an important part having regard to the constitutional protections, both written and unwritten, enjoyed by every citizen.

Honourable senators, this chamber, in my opinion, can also perform a useful purpose in that respect. Contrary to some impressions, the concept that this house is a citadel of privilege and a fortress of prejudice does not conform to the facts. To the extent that we were subjected to feudalism in this country, we have emerged from this condition and this house does not partake of those outdated and quasimediaeval characteristics. It is my view, therefore, that this house can be considered as one which is completely au courant with current social and political trends. In our deliberations in this august chamber, it is my earnest belief that one of our prime duties should be to see that at all times the fundamental rights of our fellow Canadians are not impaired in any way and that our essential liberties remain at all times without being subject to erosion.

It might well be desirable that a careful study be made by a committee of this house to consider ways and means for the purposes of bringing about this desired objective.

The constitutional issue and the distribution of powers between the central and provincial governments is, of course, a matter of grave concern to all of us. All governing bodies enjoy the privilege of taxing the citizen and in the struggle for such right too little attention is paid to the citizen who, because of the bloodletting, may be subjected to a form of anaemia which in due course could lead to an accelerated demise.