

The Constitution

members of the House for giving me close attention and for listening to what I have said in this debate. I hope other members will have an opportunity either now or in committee, or later on when the report comes from the committee, to express their opinion on this all-important subject. What we are doing is asking the Parliament of Canada to act on this resolution because it is the only institution in Canada that is capable of acting. We are asking the Parliament of Canada to act because it was not possible to reach an agreement with the provinces at the first ministers' conference. Yesterday, at the conference of provincial premiers in Toronto, it was evident that even the ten premiers could not agree among themselves. Is disagreement and inaction to be the permanent formula in the constitutional field? We say no. We say we have tried. Disagreement is continuing and it is now time to move. May I say in conclusion, maybe as a footnote to irony, that I could hardly believe my ears and eyes this morning when I heard and read that the premiers of the provinces were going to the courts, that they were taking what ought to be a political debate and political battle for the minds and support of the Canadian people to the courts for settlement. That from a group who argued for a whole day during the first ministers' conference that it was inappropriate to entrust the fundamental rights and freedoms of Canadians to the courts.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1620)

Hon. David Crombie (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to make the point that I welcome the opportunity to be able to speak on this matter. As one who was able to spend some time throughout the summer and, indeed, over the last month or two on the matter of the constitution, I do not mind saying that it has been a most difficult subject with which to deal from our side of the fence. There are some good reasons for this situation.

First of all, most of my constituents are concerned about jobs, inflation, budgets, pensions and medicare. Those are the things which bother them on a daily basis and which will bother them in the near future. They realize this and they want to know why we are not dealing with these matters. Second, much of what they understood of the constitutional debate came to them through discussions either by the federal government or through debates between the federal government and the provincial premiers. Much of what would engage their attention in those discussions did not seem to bring them directly into considerations as to what issues are at stake.

The third reason for the situation is that the people were faced with what I can only call the \$6 million man, the Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming), who was able to take the constitutional matters before this country and reduce them into the most simplistic terms possible, the kinds of terms which would sell pancakes, cornflakes or any other commodity.

I have found it much easier in the past few weeks to deal with the constitution because the people in the riding of Rosedale, and I would venture to say in the city of Toronto

and metropolitan Toronto, with whom I have been in touch, are finally beginning to understand that there is more to the proposal than meets the eye. It is not merely the desire on the part of everyone to bring home the constitution. Every Canadian would like that to happen. But that is not what we are doing; that is only what they were told we are doing.

Once one gets that clear, and into the constitution itself, they realize an old truth, which is that constitutions are indeed very important to them. Changes to constitutions change the relationship between people, between governments and between people and governments. Unless those changes are rooted in principles upon which we agree, then we will not have either social or economic stability in this country. Until we have social and economic stability through the constitution we will not be able to deal adequately with problems related to inflation, jobs, pensions, medicare and all those things which affect people directly.

During discussions with my constituents and other people in Toronto, we have an interesting time because we try to remember much of the history which we were taught so that we can understand the proposals that are before us and what might be good for the country in the future. Constitutional proposals can get very complicated, but the principles behind those proposals and, indeed, behind the Constitution of Canada, are not complicated. There are five fundamental principles which animate and organize the Canadian constitution. I would like to deal with those five principles because I want to measure the proposals from the government against them.

The first principle is that of national union. I emphasize this because very often we forget that the first purpose in 1867 was to organize a national union. Indeed, the wording in the British North America Act is never "confederation" but "union". There is no doubt that when the British North America Act was organized from 1864 to 1867, the fathers knew, or felt at any rate, that they were creating a new nationality. Let me offer a few short quotes to show what people in those days felt they were doing when it came to national union. D'Arcy McGee said:

I hope to see the day . . . when there will be no other term to our patriotism, but the common name of Canadian, without the prefix of either French or British.

Cartier said:

The great object and the great question was whether there could not be any means devised by which the great national fragments comprised in each of the British American provinces could be brought together and made into a great nation.

A new nationality meant something that had not existed before, something obviously different from the old status of a British colony. Colonel Gray of Prince Edward Island said that it needs no prophet to foretell that the day would come when we would take our place among the nations of the world.

The library in our Parliament abounds with quotations to explain that we were not only dealing with the regions and the provinces. Indeed, as someone from the other side of the House said, "We are more than the sum of our parts". This country is