

*The Constitution*

I want to add that the problem, as I perceive it, has not been so much the failure of Parliament—Parliament trundles along doing its best in the democratic framework that it has been built from—but rather it has been the failure of this very government to rebuild the trust of the Canadian people. I see time and time again evidence that trust was shattered in the midst of the Meech Lake fiasco. The Prime Minister's admission that he had chosen to roll the dice with the future of this nation was in fact for many Canadians, and I would suggest many people in my riding, the last straw. It caused a real shattering in their belief not only in this Prime Minister and this government but in the system itself.

Meech Lake failed not because of any dislike for Quebec whatsoever—I would suggest that would be the last of any reasons—but rather it failed because of a repudiation of a process that excluded the fundamental involvement of the Canadian people. People rejected this kind of executive federalism. They wanted to become involved in a very fundamental way in the process of resolving the issues that the Meech Lake Accord was attempting to address.

Largely as a result of the Prime Minister's handling of Meech Lake, there has been a loss of faith in this government and there has been a loss of faith in the very political foundations of Canada.

I think there is a widespread opinion that the Prime Minister opened a constitutional can of worms with his belief, his dream if you like, that he could finish the work that former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau could not accomplish, and that was to get Quebec's signature as a full partner of our Canadian family. The current Prime Minister's failure at achieving that process has in essence left this nation paralysed while he attempts to undo the very damage that he has done. Through this endless flurry of commissions, of studies, of parliamentary committees, of more debate, he attempts to correct that damage.

Some of these, like the Spicer commission, I think people have recognized have done some very good work. The recent national forums have also proven to be successful. But the result has been that this concentration, this focusing on the singular issue facing Canadians

has essentially paralysed the parliamentary process and has left an utter failure of the government to recognize other serious problems, such as our failing economy.

I think that probably summarizes some of the real concerns. I see my time is very limited and I had a lot more to say on it. It summarizes some of the concerns that people have with regard to the national unity debate.

The 28 proposals are very wide-ranging indeed, and I think that is one of the real difficulties with the proposals. The fact is that there is simply too much on our constitutional plate.

• (2000)

What we are dealing with here when you look at the whole ball of wax is a massive revamping of our socioeconomic structure, the consequences of which are anything but clear. Perhaps the Prime Minister wants Canadians once again to take another leap of faith, as he called it, as we did with free trade. But there are simply too many unknowns.

Speaking on behalf of my constituents, the 28-point proposal is too unwieldy to be resolved within the timeframe we have left. In the final analysis the package is too complex. There are simply too many proposals on the table. The timeframe is too short to resolve all the issues. Forcing Canada to abide by this timeframe, which is dictated by Quebec's call for a referendum on sovereignty, will be to ensure failure.

I think it was the general consensus in the meetings that I held that the government should try to condense the proposals into something that is workable, something that is doable. After all, what is the use in fighting to save the future of Canada? If we do not resolve our economic dilemma, we may not have a Canada left.

Certainly a pared down version of a core set of proposals would stand a much greater chance, I suggest, of acceptance by both English and French Canada. The discussion of the distinct society has to be included as one of those pillars in a pared down proposal; addressing the concerns of our aboriginal people and certainly the question of Senate reform. I think a pared down version of these three pillars would make a lot of sense, something we might actually be able to handle.