

The Constitution

peoples, including my own ancestors, who experienced the shame and anger of discrimination. How, then, am I to vote on this parliamentary resolution to entrench a charter of rights and freedoms and patriate the Constitution from Great Britain? How will each of us as parliamentarians, men and women of conscience, vote? Shall we be guided by the principles and content of the resolution or by the process? Each of us must make our own decision, and we must put people before party, country before province and conscience before convenience when making that decision.

An hon. Member: Bravo, bravo!

Mr. Yurko: My party has chosen to base its collective decision on process. Most of my colleagues have rejected unilateral action by the federal Parliament in both patriation and entrenchment of rights.

I do not agree with most of my colleagues, and have stated so publicly and honestly. I am in agreement with Premier Davis and Premier Hatfield and all their supporters, Conservatives in Canada.

I have chosen to base my decision to support the resolution on the principles and content of the resolution rather than the process. In doing so, and in announcing that decision, I have received much correspondence. Canadians wrote to me. For every letter against my position, I received no less than three upholding it. What did these letters say? Well, those who supported me stated, first, the time to patriate was now so that we could then go about building a nation. Second, they said that unanimous agreement by all the provinces was improbable and illusionary. Third, the entrenchment of basic human rights was mandatory, and fourth, they expressed a real concern for the continued unity of this nation.

● (2120)

Those against my position fell into three categories. First, a genuine concern over provincial disagreement with the process and different provincial constitutional status and the lack of a reference to God; second, a genuine hate for the Prime Minister, particularly because of his past record; third, raw ugly bigotry against the French fact in Canada and its further entrenchment and extension. Most of the letters in the third category were not signed.

In the positive letters, the concern for continued national cohesiveness or unity was pervasive. This wonderful, emotional and moving concern for the country reminded me of why I entered politics in 1968 after working for almost seven years in the United States. In 1968, I made my first speech in a constituency which was contested by a skinny fellow, the hon. member for Edmonton North (Mr. Paproski) who won the nomination. Therefore, I reverted to provincial politics. I said in that speech:

The very foundations of our nation are quivering. Unstable because of the lack of a common Canadianism. We live in a land divided—divided by geography—divided by origin—divided by wealth—divided by beliefs and divided by desires.

There is growing in our land a fungus—a fungus called “separatism”. We have two varieties—an eastern kind and a western kind. Each of us must recognize that this fungus must be eradicated from the face of our nation. We all

sense this need for servitude under only one flag—with only one anthem—to recognize only one “Canadianism”. A “Canadianism” which is broad enough and flexible enough to embrace all our cultures, and more than one language if necessary, all our beliefs and all our hopes. A “Canadianism” which will result in a nation of power. A powerful nationalism which will be a moving force in the international community. To the development of this type of “Canadianism” I will dedicate my efforts if elected.

For 13 years I have pursued and will continue to pursue the commitment I gave on my first attempt at political nomination.

The concern for national unity, for a national cohesiveness, and for the evolution of a Canadian brotherhood is as keen today as it was 13 years ago.

We all witness in our country bickering over wealth, over power, over prestige, over preservation and over prominence. The fungus of separatism has grown substantially during the last 13 years. We have had to deal with a serious attempt, through a democratic referendum, at separation called “sovereignty-association”. Canada won that round, thanks to the work of many, including many from this House. Why have we not been able to deal effectively with the problems of the nation as they evolve and intensify? I maintain it is because our Constitution resides in another country and we have not yet found the way to change it step by step when it needs amendment to meet the reality of a growing complex society which is increasingly becoming interdependent.

We have continued to bicker and quarrel and seldom agree as a quasi-federation of ten provinces with a central national Parliament. The Canadian Constitution must be patriated now; it is timely. Further delay will only increase national divisiveness and turmoil. Perhaps much of the fault for increasing divisiveness can be directly attributed to the failure of this national Parliament and the enormous growth of provincial governments since the war. This resolution cannot fail; it must succeed.

There has been much fractiousness in this House. I was not used to such fractiousness in the other assembly in which I served for ten years. Questionable accusations abound in this place, yet we set ourselves up as an example for the nation, as the moulders and builders of a country. What an example to be broadcast daily across our land! Partisan political gamesmanship in this House is pervasive, constricting and an anathema to both statesmanship and national evolution. This is true on all sides.

The discord and fractiousness between regions, between provinces and Parliament is no more and no less than a reflection of the discord in this place. We have not yet found a common cause, a common direction, or a common destiny as a nation. We are not even a nation in law because our Constitution still resides in another country, but we have become a nation in spirit, the spirit of universal brotherhood where peoples from virtually every land in the world can live, work, play, fraternize and worship separately, yet together. It is that exciting spiritual realization that stimulates us and makes us tremble with anticipation. It is that excitement which has been captured in the content of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms embodied in the resolution before this House.