

The Address—Mr. Brewin

debate; and to you sir, and to Mr. Speaker Lamoureux and to Mr. Deputy Speaker Batten we would also like to express our warm congratulations.

There is one delightful feature of this debate. We can jump from subject to subject with great freedom even though the topics under discussion are completely unrelated. I propose to do precisely this. I have two subjects which I wish to discuss particularly: One is the contribution which this parliament could make to Canadian unity; the other is the key issue today in international affairs—the war in Viet Nam.

In the Speech from the Throne the following words are to be found:

The preservation and strengthening of Canadian identity and unity is the most important trust and responsibility of parliament and of my government.

I wish to underline the words “responsibility of parliament”.

I noted also the eloquent words of the Prime Minister in his speech last Thursday. He said:

It will matter much—indeed, it could be decisive for Canada's future, whatever position we may hold, whatever responsibility we may have—if we do not act to the very best of our ability to exploit every chance we may get, to use every quality we may possess in serving Canada, as we face up to and in the end meet the challenges ahead. We will then be judged in this parliament, Mr. Speaker, by our deeds and not by our words.

Those were the words of the Prime Minister last Thursday. Earlier in his speech he outlined some of the challenges to which he was referring. He said this:

We have not only economic, financial and social problems, but we have political and constitutional problems arising out of the federal character of our state We must decide on the priority of problems which confront our country politically as well as economically and find new administrative and political techniques and frameworks within which each region of Canada can develop according to its own particular requirements, but as part of a strong and united country.

I heartily subscribe to these words, as I imagine do all members of this house. I want to make the substance of my speech an appeal to the Prime Minister to make it possible for members of parliament to contribute in meeting the challenge of the problems of Canadian unity.

I want to urge that machinery be set up whereby parliament can contribute to meeting the challenge, namely a committee of this house representative of all parties, charged with the responsibility of recommending what changes if any are needed in our consti-

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tutional framework to meet the crisis of confederation, as it has been called.

As most hon. members probably know, the Royal Commission on Biculturalism and Bilingualism has told us that this crisis is a grave danger to Canada and calls for major changes. It would be a strange anomaly if the one institution which was not asked to confront this problem and examine it directly and in detail was the parliament of Canada.

It is a truism to say that we live in an era of rapid social change. It would surely be a strange accident if a constitution devised for a group of British colonies one hundred years ago, predominantly agricultural in nature, fitted the needs of a modern industrial community in the second half of the twentieth century.

But why do I suggest that a committee of this house is an important means of dealing with the crisis of confederation? It is because this house is representative, as no other group of people can be, of the people of Canada. We come from every region of Canada; we represent nearly every significant political viewpoint in Canada; we represent that practical political judgment which is important and indeed vital to the solution of these problems.

It is important that we should have the advice of experts. Indeed, we have in this house some who qualify as experts in this field. I cite, for example, the hon. member for Mount Royal (Mr. Trudeau). But experts are not enough. The responsibility rests on us, members of the parliament of Canada.

I deplore the view expressed, apparently, by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Favreau) in Montreal on Saturday, when he suggested that reform of the constitution should not be entrusted to a parliament which, as he put it, might be dominated, or would be dominated, by sentimental colonialists. Mr. Speaker, he is too pessimistic. There may be a trace of sentimental colonialism in some sections of this house—I am not looking in any particular direction now—but I do not believe that such an attitude is dominant in any party and I find it strange that the minister should defend his own conservative attitude—I use the word advisedly—of procrastination in matters involving constitutional change behind such a transparent smoke-screen.

I am convinced the importance of this question is such that the representatives of all parties in the house on such a committee would rise to the occasion and render a signal service to this house and to Canada. The