

As you know, I have heard all the other arguments, for instance "let us be flexible" and so on. Flexible on what? I, for one, am quite prepared to be as flexible as possible, but I would like to know in what matters precisely I should be so. They do not say. They refer to very general concepts. Therefore, one thing is certain, the sooner this referendum takes place the better for everybody—Quebecers as well as other Canadians. The sword of Damocles cannot hang this way over the people's head, as it is at present, without running into a disaster, because people want to know where this adventure will lead them. Then, what will happen? What kind of formula will be used? I read the white paper on the referendum. Well, I am sorry to say it is not honest to ask a question in this way of the people.

It does not mean that a large majority of Quebecers are in favour of separatism. I, for one, was a separatist at the age of 17. It is not a crime in itself. On the contrary, it is a crime to manipulate people and force them to go where they do not want to go. It is both criminal and unfair. We are therefore at this stage of our proceedings. An inquiry has been undertaken under the chairmanship of Mr. Robarts and Mr. Pepin. The more opinions that will be expressed, the better it will be. I have no objection to that, but it reminds me of what goes on in a laboratory. In a lab, it is possible to have several guinea pigs; if one is a failure, another is used, but you cannot do that with a nation. You see, there are some people who believe that they can break up a country without taking the consequences. It is impossible. It has never been the case and never will be. If you break up a country, bad feelings will last a long time, if not always. Therefore, I believe that if one wants to be really honest, one must say those things and that if separation occurs, and I sincerely believe this, Quebecers will have a high price to pay. Very high! I do not object to their saying it to them and perhaps our people are willing to make that sacrifice. But it is to mislead them to make them believe that our problems will be easily resolved afterwards.

[English]

I was listening to some people saying that one of the main causes of Quebec's wanting to separate is unemployment. Come on! You have never been in Quebec if you think that way. The support the PQ got was not in the poor regions of Quebec, but in Montreal, where people are working and earning good wages. That is where they got the support of teachers and students. Do not come and tell me it was because of unemployment in Quebec. The province would have separated two or three generations ago if that were the case.

Don't think I like the unemployment there is in Quebec. All I am saying is that it is not the cause of the secessionist movement. Think of the Gaspé, and the St. Lawrence and Lake St. John regions, where in the winter there is sometimes 20 or 25 per cent unemployment. Those are not the places where the separatists are the strongest.

It is often repeated that the federal government is for the status quo. French Canadians have been in this country for many years, and they have had, and will continue to have, many reasons for complaint. In the reports of the B and B

Commission we can read of all kinds of vexations and injustices. Just read them, and you will have all the complaints you need.

However, if each country in which there have been problems is going to proceed backwards, and try to correct past injustices, I think the world would turn out to be an awful hell. If things had not turned out in the manner in which they did, such as in the case of the war of secession in the United States, why not start it all over again? Consider for a moment the way in which France was united, the way in which Italy was united, and even the way in which Britain, at one time, was united. History is full of situations which are impossible to correct after centuries have passed.

Sometimes, from places in the west, I hear things like: "Those damn French Canadians, we're going to teach them a lesson. We're going to start 1760 all over again, and they're going to get it." Such talk is entirely silly and irresponsible. You know, this is not much better than what we hear sometimes in Quebec. So I tell those people that a big country, the United States of America, tried to control Vietnam and did not succeed. So I do not believe that we should look in that direction for a sound solution.

I am not trying to provoke; I am not trying to start a war of any kind. All I want you to understand is that we must be realistic. We have a living country, and it is just like a human being, in that it cannot be operated on in the same manner as cattle.

● (1450)

[Translation]

It would not be the same thing, for sure.

So, now you have people saying they are going to revamp the whole country. You have the Maritimes. You have Prince Edward Island. You have New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. They are going to make five or six regions. They are going to have a corridor. In short, 150 different theories can be had. But the one thing we know for sure is that Canada is what it is, and the only thing to do if we do not want to break it down is to change it by meeting and negotiating honestly and seeking solutions to our problems. We know that the Constitution must be amended. It was amended several times in the past and will again be in the future. There is probably not enough flexibility in this area. The Russians have just amended theirs. They did it by a show of hands and they immediately sent it to the moon. I think it did not get there, for that matter. But, in any case, the Constitution can be amended, and, as I suggested, there has probably been too much rigidity in this area. But I do not think it is possible to continue playing this game of hide-and-seek. We are going to separate or we are not going to. That is the basic issue. Once it has been dealt with, it will be time for the constitutionalists, the specialists, to try and correct what is wrong in our constitutional structures. But not under the threat of a separation that nobody has been elected to bring about—I repeat, that nobody has been elected to bring about.