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Bourassa's demands still vague

Speaking in the House of Commons last October, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau formally pledged to patriate the Canadian constitution before the next federal election. Currently, those provisions of the British North America Act which affect federal-provincial relations can only be amended by reference to the British Parliament. So far, there has been little public indication that Mr. Trudeau is making progress toward the fulfilment of his pledge.

The principal impediment has been Premier Robert Bourassa of Quebec. He has repeatedly declared that his government will not agree to any patriation formula unless the constitution is first amended so as to accord cultural sovereignty to Quebec.

Mr. Bourassa has never precisely defined what he means by cultural sovereignty. In his most recent comment on constitutional reform, he said: "It seems to me in effect altogether normal that it should be acknowledged that Quebec ought to have the power and the means to decide finally all major questions concerning the protection and the development of her language and culture." He also spoke of a need for, "very clear constitutional guarantees in those sectors naturally related to cultural security, among which communications and immigration are particularly significant."

This is the most specific statement that Premier Bourassa has ever made on this subject. It remains so vague as to be essentially meaningless.

Does he want his government to have a veto power over the CBC in Quebec as was once demanded by his former communications minister, Jean Paul L'Allier? Or would he be satisfied if

the Quebec government was accorded the right to establish a rival general broadcasting network in the province?

Neither of these alternatives should be granted by Ottawa. General, as distinct from educational, programming on radio and television — whether broadcast or transmitted exclusively by cable — should remain the final responsibility of the federal government

acting in consultation with the provinces. General programming subject to provincial control could become a powerful instrument for propagandizing provincial interests opposed to the federal government, with serious consequences for national unity. The CBC and Canadian Radio-Television Commission have served both French- and English-Canadians well. Their independence and power should not be curtailed.

Mr. Bourassa's demands concerning immigration are equally vague. If he does not soon come forth with precise and reasonable proposals for constitutional revision, Mr. Trudeau could be tempted to proceed with constitutional patriation unilaterally. This would be unfortunate for the country and hardly likely to advance Mr. Bourassa's own political fortunes.