



R

PRESS - CLIPPINGS

COUPURES DE JOURNAUX

Montreal Star

Name of Publication ..... A 6 ..... Nom de la publication  
Date ..... APR 23 1975 ..... Date

Still conditions  
on the constitution

PIERRE TRUDEAU's hopes of getting quick agreement from the provinces to a formula for amending the Canadian constitution at home look more remote every time Robert Bourassa opens his mouth.

As he was four years ago in Victoria, Mr. Bourassa is philosophically in favor of a fully Canadian constitution. But, as he did four years ago, he intends to attach preconditions to agreement on a new amending formula. And, as four years ago, the details of those preconditions may not be known until the last minute and, indeed, may vary according to the political climate of the moment.

Four years ago, the preconditions concerned social policy. The failure to produce a constitutional formula enshrining Quebec's pre-eminence in social affairs led to the collapse of the entire process of constitutional review. It did not, it should be noted, prevent substantial practical changes in welfare policies to accommodate Quebec's desires, nor has it stood in the way of the wholesale restructuring of welfare policy now under way.

Mr. Bourassa's preconditions this time touch on what the premier is pleased to call "cultural sovereignty." As in the case of social policy, there is some substance to the Quebec position. The government of Quebec is the only one that represents a majority of French-speaking Canadians. It does need powers to protect their language and culture. That is one of the reasons we have a federal country in the first place. In the long run, as French Canadians become an ever smaller proportion of the entire Canadian population, it may need to strengthen

those powers.

But there are powerful forces working against any move in that direction at the moment. The Quebec government's arguments that it needs more powers in the area of culture are not strengthened by its propensity to abuse the powers it already has. And Mr. Bourassa's glib spouting about cultural sovereignty in a Canadian common market will not win many friends among those who think that a provincial premier should demonstrate more commitment to the federation than a willingness to accept equalization payments and cheap oil from his neighbors.

On a strictly practical level, there are serious obstacles to constitutional change. Ottawa and Quebec are already at loggerheads over control of communications, one of the chief areas in which this province wants expanded constitutional powers. Experience has shown that if disagreements cannot be settled on a day-to-day level they are not going to be settled on a constitutional one.

A similar problem arises in the area of immigration. Quebec can be given greater influence over the immigrants who come here. But as soon as the provincial government seeks control, a fundamental problem arises. To be effective, control over immigration to Quebec must involve control not only over those coming from abroad but those coming from other provinces. And as soon as citizens are prevented from moving freely from one province to another, Canada ceases to be a free country, and perhaps to be a

country at all.

All these factors argue against any attempt to revive the constitutional issue at this moment. There is one other, even more telling. That is that there are simply more urgent matters for governments to be concerned about right now. Citizens who see their governments fiddling again over the constitution while the country falls into economic disrepair are apt to become bloody-minded.