

CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

Q: Monsieur le Premier ministre, M. Bourassa indiquait il y a quelques semaines son intention de rouvrir le dossier constitutionnel. De votre côté est-ce que vous seriez prêt à faire la même chose. Quand et sur quelle base reprendriez-vous les pourparlers sur la Constitution?

R: Eh bien, comme je l'ai déjà indiqué à la suite de la Conférence de Victoria je ne veux pas prendre l'initiative de rouvrir ce dossier s'il ne semble pas y avoir possibilité de faire un progrès substantiel et réel et ça, ça dépend des participants à la Conférence. Il y a eu des discussions privées entre certains fonctionnaires fédéraux et des fonctionnaires provinciaux. Il est vrai que nous explorons la possibilité de rouvrir le dossier mais il n'est véritablement pas ouvert et ne sera pas ouvert tant que je ne serai pas convaincu que nous pouvons faire un progrès substantiel. Je pense que la façon de réaliser ce progrès sera de discuter uniquement du problème du rapatriement et du problème de l'amendement constitutionnel. Mais si nous nous mettons à discuter de la division des pouvoirs entre les deux niveaux de gouvernement nous allons recommencer la comédie des 50 dernières années où toutes sortes de gouvernements successifs tant fédéraux que provinciaux ont essayé de rapatrier la Constitution et on n'a jamais réussi à le faire. Comme je l'ai dit dès le mois d'octobre dernier je trouve scandaleux qu'un pays indépendant comme le Canada soit encore obligé d'aller en Angleterre pour amender sa constitution et je suis convaincu que le peuple canadien veut en finir de cette comédie mais je suis quant à moi décidé d'en finir.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, in recent months there has been increasing speculation, particularly among some of the provincial governments, that we probably will be into a new round of constitutional negotiations in the near future. Are you anxious to see those talks reopen, and would ^{you} be receptive to a proposal from the provinces for the reopening?

A: Well, as I was answering earlier, I am receptive to the idea of reopening. I made quite clear, however, after the failure in Victoria that I didn't see any purpose in reopening the constitutional debate until private talks - bilateral and multilateral had led me to believe that we can be successful this time. Such private talks are in fact going on at the official level, exploration of what would be possible. Our point of view is that the only way is bringing the constitution back to Canada and amending it in Canada and having what every other independent state in the world has, its own constitution and its right to amend that constitution in its own country. But this is the thing we must solve and we won't solve it if we begin to get back into arguments about the division of powers, which has been the stumbling block for many years in constitutional debates. We agreed in Victoria on a formula of amendment, and a formula of repatriation, subject to other things. These other things didn't happen, so the thing collapsed. Now my view would be that we should bring the BNA Act back, we should give ourselves the right to amend it, and then once it is in Canada we should go on to try to discuss the division of powers. I can't believe any Canadian citizen from any province thinks, for instance, that the division of power has more chances of being altered when the constitution is in Britain than when it's in Canada. If there is to be a change in the division of powers it will have to be discussed and agreed upon in Canada, and therefore there is no real right or reason or need to have that constitution in the United Kingdom. And you know, I'm prepared to put this case to the Canadian people quite clearly and I can't imagine anyone, except those who don't believe in Canada, who see any interest in having our constitution sit in some other country, and who will use all kinds of pretexts to keep it there.