

NOTE TO M. KIRBY

Parliamentary Strategy

A. Assumptions

The following is a proposed course of action for handling the debate in Parliament on the Constitution. This paper is predicated on the assumption that there will be at least two weeks of debate before any decision is made to refer the matter to a Committee.

If a decision were made to announce in advance the government's intention to refer the resolution to a committee, it is likely that Opposition parties would keep the debate very short so as to be able to turn their attention quickly to economic matters. They would welcome a committee study because it would give them the opportunity to arrange for groups to submit briefs critical of the government. At the same time, the Opposition will not have to argue against the popular elements of the package. Furthermore, to announce in advance that the resolution will be referred to a Committee will break the momentum which is so important to success.

On the other hand, if the government is prepared to recall Parliament no later than October 6, the resolution could be debated for three consecutive weeks and a budget could be introduced in the last week of October. Three weeks or

fourteen days of House time would permit ample time for all Opposition members who wish to speak. This is so on the basis of two assumptions:

- 1) that not all Opposition members will speak for the full forty minutes, and
- 2) that not all Opposition members will want to speak either because they have no interest in the subject matter or because they disagree with the position of their Party.

The strategy proposed is based on the assumption that there will be a three week debate and that no decision will be made until the end of the second week as to whether to send the resolution to a committee or to expect a vote by the end of the third week.

B. Proposal

- 1) There should be a small committee to co-ordinate the government's handling of the debate. This committee which would meet every morning at 9:00 a.m. would consist of Messrs. Chrétien, Roberts, Fleming and Pinard and the Parliamentary Secretary for Minister of Justice. The committee would review progress in the House, would determine what points government speakers should make, would review media coverage of the debate, and would decide on the number of government speakers on each day.

- 2) There should be one or two ministers to speak every day. An announcement would be made the previous day as to which ministers are speaking. A press release summarizing the important points made in a minister's speech would be ready for distribution immediately upon completion of the speech.
- 3) Speeches and press releases for ministers should be prepared and vetted twenty-four hours before release.
- 4) The leadoff government speaker should be the Minister of Justice. His speech and a press release highlighting it will be given wide public distribution immediately following its delivery. To ensure that it receives the widest possible coverage, no other minister should speak on the first day.
- 5) The second minister to speak should be Mr. Roberts. His speech should be inasmuch as possible a reasoned rebuttal to the criticisms which will have been made by the leaders of the two Opposition Parties and by the provincial Premiers. No other minister should speak on that day so as to ensure maximum coverage for Mr. Roberts.

- 6) By the end of the first day, we will have some assessment of the reaction of the Opposition, the provinces and the media to the resolution and to the Prime Minister's television speech. At that time a decision should be made as to what two ministers should speak on the third day. It may be necessary to have two Western ministers (including one in the Senate) or a Western minister and a Quebec minister. This will depend on where the Opposition is most pronounced.
- 7) After the second day, the co-ordinating committee should be able to make tentative assignments of speaking dates for ministers.
- 8) As it is likely that the first week of debate will provide most of the agreements against the government's course of action, the Prime Minister should consider speaking at the end of the first week so as to provide a focus for the rest of the debate and so as to regain whatever initiative is inevitably lost in any lengthy debate.
- 9) The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice should keep a list of government members who wish to speak. He should have enough members ready to speak at all times and should co-ordinate who is speaking when and for how long, and should ensure that speaking notes are distributed to those members who need them. If government members keep their speeches short, the debate will move more quickly.

- 10) At the end of the first week of debate, the co-ordinating committee should assess whether the number of government speakers should be reduced so as to permit the debate to end sooner while at the same time allowing Opposition members to have their say. This decision should be based in part on an assessment of how much coverage the debate is generating and how much coverage individual members are receiving. There is no point putting up speakers and thereby extending the debate if they are receiving minimal coverage.
- 11) Rather than take every opportunity to speak in the House, it may be more effective for the government to have leading members speak across the country while the debate is taking place.
- 12) In terms of the Opposition, it will be important that a full briefing be arranged for spokesmen of both parties immediately before the Resolution is tabled. Such a briefing should be similar to a pre-budget briefing. It is essential to avoid any criticism that the normal courtesies have been ignored.
- 13) It is very important that the first government speaker to follow Mr. Chrétien be carefully chosen. He should be non francophone and should be able to deliver a moving but low-key speech. One possible candidate would be Charles Caccia as he can speak as a new Canadian.

E. Goldenberg