

CANADIANS

FOR

CANADA

A Brief

Presented

To

The Special Joint Committee on the Constitution

January 8, 1981.

CANADIANS FOR CANADA

We have come together spontaneously and by personal referral as a non-partisan non-political group of committed Canadians because of our concern for the future of our country.

We are deeply troubled about attitudes hardening across regions of Canada which could lead to fragmentation of its parts. In the absence of a unifying strategy responding to the felt interests of all parts of the country we are witnessing the growth of disturbingly negative attitudes in one province or region after another.

Should this fragmentation proceed much further, the resulting suspicion and anger could take years to dispel. This will lead to diminishing prospects for a united Canada.

We are convinced also that Canadians in all walks of life are suddenly aware of their country to a degree unparalleled in our memories. There will be no reversion to passive abstinence from public affairs in the foreseeable future. Canadians now wish, and are ready, to be involved.

We believe that the immediate, critically urgent task, nation-wide, is to create a new Canada capable of fulfilling our collective aspirations. We must nurture our unity with appropriate recognition of

contemporary conditions. We must do it through discovery, not political manoeuvre.

This new Canada will take time to develop. We are prepared to contribute to the process thoughtfully, deliberately and with urgency. We know that it is for the sake of ourselves and our grandchildren, rather than to satisfy any one political timetable. We do not accept the proposition that federal-provincial negotiations must fail. We are prepared to help them succeed.

Canada has a potential for its peoples' well-being second to none in the world. We must not, because of haste which arouses correlate resistance and denies time for committed Canadians to participate, close off efforts to define a new Canadian consensus.

The Constitution

To serve us well, a new constitution must command more provincial and public support than is now apparent in response to current federal proposals. We recognize that no general constitutional proposal developed to date has captured unanimous provincial and federal endorsement, although the record shows that negotiations by these two levels of government have come close on a number of issues. With so many complex and changing considerations, impatience is not justified. Further and continued exploration

s imperative, in our view. The ultimate prize of general support overwhelmingly justifies the effort of continued negotiation.

We are dismayed by the prospect of patriation of the British North America Act to Canada carrying amendments and amending formulae, enacted by the United Kingdom Parliament on the unilateral request of Ottawa. There is evidence that this plan does not encompass the interests of newer regions or Indian and native peoples, let alone carry the support of a majority of the partner provinces within the present Confederation. We see clearly the necessity of preserving the vitality and commitments of the partnership of provinces within a federal state. We do not believe in unilateral action by government in this situation as being suitable for Canada.

We should not ask the British Government to perform our task. In the absence of further federal-provincial agreement on other matters of substance, the only request we should make of the United Kingdom Parliament is for patriation with an amending formula acceptable to Ottawa and the provinces. Then Canadians can get on with the business of developing their own made-in-Canada constitution.

Energy Policy

Failure of the federal and concerned provincial governments to reach agreement on a national energy policy is not unrelated to our

constitutional crises. It relates to the constitutional crisis in terms of the question of effective ownership and control of resources. In addition it is adversely affecting the climate in which constitutional changes are being debated.

Opposition to the proposed energy policy is bitter, general and growing. Criticism is more than political or government jousting. It comes predictably from oil and gas businesses which have created a large employment base in Western Canada and have steadily attracted the capital investment we have needed -- and will continue to need. It comes also from industry suppliers who are already reporting the departure of needed hardware, technology and management skills from Canada. It is beginning to come from Ontario-domiciled industries which base their employment and capital investments in considerable degree upon a thriving Western economy, and see their business prospects diminishing.

We realize there are widely conflicting interpretations of the impact of the energy policy on the health of the oil and gas industry, on its interdependence with Canadian industry wherever domiciled, on the likelihood of national energy self-sufficiency, and on the Canadian economy. This confusion has to be resolved promptly, before Canada loses credibility internationally to compound the discouragement of this vital industry. Many senior economists, including those associated with

the Economic Council of Canada and the Ontario Economic Council have expressed grave reservations about key aspects of the energy policy in its present form.

If this were purely and exclusively a one-industry, one-province protest, others in Canada with differing preoccupations might understandably wish to turn it aside. We see the lack of accord on energy policy to have an immediate and lasting detrimental effect on the entire Canadian economy. And we urge that federal-provincial accord concerning a revised energy policy be reached without delay to arrest further economic decline. Here again, informed Canadian are eager and prepared to contribute to political intelligence of the issues to be resolved.

Further Action

We propose to co-ordinate and structure ourselves as quickly as possible for the purposes of making the thoughts and voices of individual leaders in Canadian business heard by our federal and provincial governments. We intend to offer our services, apolitically, towards the early resolution of the energy impasse, and towards positive, thoughtful resolution of the constitutional crisis.

We are assured of broadening support among individual Canadian business men who have already declared themselves spontaneously along

lines similar to this statement. They will be representative of all regions and include Indian and native leaders. We intend to develop a national steering committee of two persons representing each province, the Yukon and Northwest Territories. Once formed, the steering committee will organize itself to offer assistance towards resolution of these two major challenges.

We anticipate immediate action, using all communications means at our disposal. To this end, we have retained as a co-ordinator/consultant, political economist Dr. John Crispo, of the University of Toronto, formerly Dean of Management Studies, with temporary offices in Toronto. With him, to guide specific economic research, will be associated a consulting economist of national stature and recognition.

It is our purpose to do all that we can to ensure a meaningful, fresh approach to solving both the constitutional and energy questions now dividing our country and curtailing its economic progress. We believe that this Parliamentary Committee will serve Canada best by recommending a delay in pursuing the existing Constitution resolution, a delay long enough to achieve a consensus of partners. While this is in progress we urge that an accord on energy policy be worked out as promptly as possible.

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