

The National Citizens' Coalition is a non-partisan body of some 30,000 Canadians. Unusually heavy mail shows that members are very disturbed by the Trudeau Government's plans to incorporate its own charter of Rights and Freedoms in a new constitution without any mandate from the people.

Changing the constitution was not an issue in the February 1980 federal election. Had it been an issue, there is little doubt that voting patterns would have been affected. Nor was it an issue in any of the latest provincial elections. The People have not been consulted.

During the Quebec referendum campaign in May 1980, Pierre Trudeau promised to change the constitution. Afterwards he said: "We made the pledge that the rest of Canada would deliver if Quebec delivered." His rush to write a new constitution is inspired not by the national interest but by a Liberal partisan interest in favor of the province that keeps it in power.

Pierre Trudeau's Charter would incorporate his Official Languages Act of 1969 in a new constitution, where it would be beyond the reach of future parliaments. By declaring English and French to be the official languages of Canada, enjoying equal rights and privileges "in all the institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada", it contravenes the British North America Act, Section 133, which limits the use of French to the Canadian Parliament, the Quebec legislature and the federal and Quebec courts. Outside Quebec, French Canadians comprise only 5.3% of the total. The effect of the Act, by discriminating in favor of French Canadians in all federal government institutions throughout English Canada, has been divisive in the extreme. The divisions are aggravated daily by the actions of provincial francophone associations, paid by the federal government to demand provincial and municipal services in French.

In twelve years Pierre Trudeau has changed Canada radically. Immigration policy has been reversed. Governmental intrusion in the economy has mushroomed. Western Canada has been alienated. Discrimination on language grounds has driven neighbors and even families apart. Coalition members and, we are convinced, the majority of Canadians think it would be wise to put these changes to the test of longer experience before incorporating any of them in a new constitution.

Finally, the Coalition believes, with Woodrow Wilson, that "The history of liberty is the history of limitations of governmental power, not the increase of it." Consequently, the Coalition recommends that writing a new Canadian constitution should be the responsibility, in the first instance, of a Constituent Assembly composed of Canadians who are separate from government. After a suitable interval - we suggest two years - the outcome of that Assembly's deliberations should be put to a national referendum. If a majority approved, it would then be adopted and passed into law by the Parliament of Canada.

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EXTRACTS FROM THE LETTERS OF COALITION MEMBERS

From Ayr, ONTARIO: "I fervently hope that some way can be found to take the constitutional debate away from the politicians and let it be decided by the Canadian people. Governments at various levels will never agree on how to share power, but they are all united in advocating and installing an ever-bigger government sector. Unless the Canadian elector has some influence on the process, bigger and more remote government will be enshrined in our new constitution.

"It's time we took a look at Switzerland - a federation with a proven record of success and stability. In their political system, by petitions and referendums, the Swiss voter has real control over the legislative process - to an extent that can only be envied by Canadians. The Swiss cantons have considerable power, which means that government is closer to the people than in any highly-centralized country. Yet local powers have not resulted in the break-up of multilingual Switzerland, nor has their economy been stifled. Quite the opposite.

"Incidentally, there are many Swiss citizens who cannot speak more than one of the four official languages. Fluent multilingualism doesn't seem to be essential to national unity, nor to the acceptance of universal military service.

"The important point, however, is that Switzerland is progressive, prosperous, and the best example of a true democracy in a Statist world. Their government has responsibly avoided inflationary policies. Can it be that their form of government has produced these desirable results? I think it is more than a coincidence."

From WEST VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA: "Your initiative is highly commendable. Only in authoritarian states do a handful of political figures impose constitutions on their citizens. Without a referendum preceded by public discussion of the principles and issues involved, our constitution will not represent the will of the Canadian people.

Furthermore, could not the present impasse be solved, even at this late hour, by referring the entire issue of writing the draft of our future constitution to an impartial assembly, free of partisan attitudes and interests?"

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From WILLOWDALE, ONTARIO: "To my knowledge, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the BNA Act. There are no powers that the provinces have that I think belong to Federal, or vice versa. I'd like to see some plain words from anyone who thinks otherwise. If there is a way to reduce Ottawa's spending power, I'd vote for that.

"One of the most dangerous things that Trudeau has done is to give the impression that the British are somehow keeping us from repatriating the constitution. It gives the idea to those who are after their own purposes that there is an enemy other than ourselves, and the ignorant believe it. It tends to set the majority against the minority (the WASPs), as if we have special status, which is ridiculous if it was not so dangerous.

"I think that a one-party democracy (so called) is a very distinct possibility for us."

From SURREY, BRITISH COLUMBIA: "Canada is an association of provinces, as the USA is a group of states, with certain measures of autonomy in both cases. The function of the federal governments should be to do only what the provinces or states cannot. Then, really and morally Canada is but the servant of the ten provinces which constitute, just as the provinces themselves are servants of the people they comprise.

"The issue of Quebec is a red herring. All the provinces, including Quebec, need much more in the way of provincial rights. The provinces should have much more freedom, less dictatorship from Ottawa, and Quebec should have more freedom to go its own way!

"Bilingualism and biculturalism do nothing to enhance relations; for one thing this stuff is forced. In Trois Rivieres, that is 99% French, there's an English language TV station; in Vancouver, there's channel 26 which is French-speaking for hardly any French-speaking people. Looks like the federal authorities are trying to annoy the French-speaking in Quebec and the English-speaking in Vancouver. If English-speaking go to Quebec, they should learn English in Vancouver.

"The great cultures Canada has are best served by emphasizing them, rather than forcing integration. Friendship between the two main groups will come about by acknowledging and encouraging these differences. Vive les differences!"

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