

● (1910)

[English]

Hon. H.A. Olson: Honourable senators, I originally introduced this inquiry—

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, will Senator Olson's intervention close the debate?

[Translation]

Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I had understood that Senator David wanted to make his speech today and I wonder whether he has now finished it.

Senator David: Yes, I have, Senator Frith.

[English]

Hon. C. William Doody (Deputy Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, there are others who wish to speak as well. I am afraid that since the debate stands in Senator Olson's name, if he speaks now his speech will have the effect of closing the debate, but I gather that that is not so. Some honourable senators wish to speak this evening and some wish to speak tomorrow on the same subject, and, rather than going through the process of trying to open another avenue or channel, I think we should stay on this order.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, it is my understanding that I yielded to Senator David on the basis of the discussion earlier today; that the debate will return to me and that it will go on after I have spoken. I intend to finish my participation at this time, but other honourable senators can speak afterwards if they so wish.

Senator Frith: That is fine, as long as it is understood. Otherwise, the rule would take effect.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, as I said a moment ago, I introduced this inquiry and, after a short speech, had it stand in my name so that it would be on the Orders of the Day. As I said at the time, I believed very sincerely that there was under way an attempt to transfer the responsibility from those people involved in the management of the Meech Lake Accord—namely, the Canadian government, including the minister who sits in this chamber—to someone else. In other words, the fault would be someone else's.

We have witnessed the Prime Minister, the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations and others attempting to transfer the responsibility for the failure of the Meech Lake Accord to someone else. It was clear to me that members of the government would make that attempt, and that is why I stood this order in my name.

As I participate in the debate this evening, it is more in sadness than anything else. Let us look around Canada. We have never had such bad federal-provincial relations. For example, the Premier of Quebec is saying that he will never come to another first ministers' meeting. The Prime Minister is saying that if Quebec does not come to the meeting there will not be a meeting. If these men mean what they say, that

[Senator David.]

process is over. I suppose we will have to wait until other personalities occupy those positions before we have any tranquility. The strange part is that after these people go on and say what a great country Canada is, they then say, "We are going to wreck it all now because we are not coming to any more meetings."

I do not have all the points in front of me; I would not repeat them anyway because I intend to make a short speech. However, time after time comments have been made to the effect that the leaders in Manitoba or the Premier of Newfoundland caused all the problems. Then Elijah Harper became the problem. I do not think we need explain what Elijah Harper was trying to do. He had every justification, as far as I am concerned, to take the action he took. Aboriginal people in this country have been ignored for a long time, and most recently when the government did not even include them in the so-called parallel resolution they had intended to introduce.

It is sad that a government that is supposed to be the government of all Canada has created this crisis. It is a crisis. It was not there before they started debating this matter. However, the way the whole thing has been managed has created a crisis. There are intense, and perhaps hard, feelings in parts of the country as a result of the so-called great debate that has brought us to this mess.

It is important that we understand the thinking of the rest of Canada. I believe Canada has changed profoundly as a result of this debate. For example, Premier Bourassa will not come to the negotiating table any more. He has said that he will not meet with the provincial premiers; that he will only have bilateral discussions with the federal government on all the issues we wish to discuss, such as immigration, communications and so on.

We have not heard much about it lately, but there used to be something called western alienation. If you think that feeling is dead, you have not been listening or following what has been taking place. Here is what will happen, and I say this without hesitation: There is no way that any one province can deal with the federal government in such a way that other provinces are excluded from getting the same kind of deal, whether it be on transportation, communications, immigration or anything else. Western Canada is pretty tired of having to knuckle under to central Canada over and over again. Absolutely nothing came out of this whole process to improve that situation. That is why I say this whole situation is sad. I think the main reason for all these problems is that nobody has been speaking for Canada. This government has never spoken for all of Canada.

● (1920)

Therefore, what we will have is a different country. It is hard to imagine what kind of country it will be. It will be difficult to set up a structure if the feelings of today are held for some time into the future. This government delivered the present situation to us.