

The Constitution

Quebec, Ontario, the prairies, British Columbia, the Yukon and western Arctic, and then perhaps put the eastern Arctic, northern Quebec and Labrador into another not-so-small area.

Within these major regions, you will find developing areas of self-interest and uniqueness. Canada's newest province, Newfoundland, not only resents being lumped in with the maritimes, but one must now refer to Atlantic Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador. I know from sitting immediately behind my hon. friend from Parry Sound-Muskoka that more than geography separates northern Ontario from the more materialistic and heavily populated southern and western parts of this province. I cannot imagine three more unusually different experiences than visiting Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. It is almost impossible to believe they are neighbours. It is almost like comparing Nova Scotians with Prince Edward Islanders or New Brunswick Acadians with the folks you meet in St. Boniface.

As for British Columbia, I have come to respect the description of politics in British Columbia offered by a former colleague of mine in the press gallery, Allan Fotheringham. He describes politics in British Columbia simply as an adventure. Mind you, he does go on to describe politics on the Prairies as a cause; here in Ontario as a business; in Quebec as a religion, and in the maritimes as a disease. That is the mosaic of Canada as seen by Mr. Fotheringham. We are breathlessly awaiting an appropriate description of politics in Newfoundland. I am actively consulting the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) and the hon. member for St. John's West on that matter, Mr. Speaker.

The point I am trying to make is this: as diversified as we are, as many strains as we go through in this nation, we began by consensus. We have survived for 113 years by consensus. Our differences were always reconcilable. They are reconcilable still. What in the world is the use of denying that fact? Why is government moving in a fashion that could tear this country apart?

By nature, I am an optimist. As a Canadian, I have always been fiercely loyal and proud of my country. The Canada I have known, the Canada in which my family and I live today, the Canada I want to see in the future for my son and for his children and for their children, is a country that builds on the 113 years of its past with all its conventions, its traditions, its incredible diversity and its indefinable character. I see a Canada of the present whose people too often take for granted how very lucky we are to live in freedom, and, when one looks around the rest of the world, how remarkably well off we are.

And when emotions cool in the wake of this constitutional revolution, I pray for very positive chances for Canada in the future. But I say this to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau): that future Canada cannot happen unless and until he adopts a more reasonable attitude toward constitutional reform. His government must replace conflict with consensus. It must replace controversy with compromise. It must replace confrontation with toleration.

I urge the government to show respect for Canada's past, to show some understanding of the tensions and differences in Canada's present so that Canada will have a positive and worth-while future.

Hon. Gerald Regan (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I suggest, the resolution we are considering at this time requires the serious and non-partisan attention of all those honoured to sit here in the highest directly-elected position our country affords. Virtually every member of this House will agree that the debate now taking place to resolve the patriation of our constitution is long overdue. We may differ as to the exact contents of the resolution as political parties are wont to do. Surely no one in this chamber shares the reported view of Premier René Lévesque that our constitution should continue to remain on the other side of the ocean.

A little later in my remarks I want to discuss the provision in this resolution for a deadlock-breaking mechanism by way of a referendum. I want to pay particular attention to what the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) had to say on that subject.

First of all, I would like to make some more general remarks about the constitution itself and the provisions which are contained in this resolution. I think that as Canadians we have long been embarrassed to say in front of an American, or a person from another country, that after 113 years of independence, we still have to go overseas—to England—to request amendments to our constitution and that the British parliament must act with elected representatives from all over the British Isles, none from Canada, to consider Canadian questions.

When I was associated with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, like other members here, I became involved in a discussion one day with a chap from Sierra Leone, and one or two others, and they would not believe me when I told them we still had to go to London to have our constitution amended. It is not only embarrassing, it is unbelievable.

If we accept that such a situation should end, let us examine the question of how it should end. I believe a resolution, such as the one before the House now, preferably with the concurrence of all the provinces, would unquestionably be ideal. This is what, all of us would wish. If there is a difference, perhaps it will lie in the wording I will turn to later—how long can one wait or should one wait to achieve that ideal and whether Canadians are content that we should go on decade after decade without our constitution having been brought home.

Unfortunately, in 53 years of attempts to achieve the desired unanimity among all the provinces, it has not been possible. The hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. Scott) who has just spoken talked of unseemingly haste. I can hardly classify him as a red Tory after that remark; that is some haste—53 years. I believe I can establish pretty reasonably to the benefit of the independent observer that if unanimity were not possible in 53 years it would be no more likely to occur in the 70 years between now and the year 2050. Before I do that let us ask the question: if unanimity cannot be achieved, are we