

*The Constitution*

If that one politician could grasp all at once the significance of being a maritimer, a Quebecker or an Ontarian, would he at the same time be able to grasp the experience of western Canada, its settlement at times seeming to be only for the exploitation of central Canada and to understand how much that means to a westerner? Could he understand how far British Columbia really is from this House and many of its debates? That is the essence of this country.

That is why in 1867 and all the conferences ahead of it it was decided that the only way this country could operate was by way of federation. It was impossible otherwise. It would have been more convenient for a unitary state, but it could not operate any other way.

Any person may think he comprehends this country in all its variety, but such understanding is not given to man. We are all shaped by our own particular view and our own particular version of the national heritage. When the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) gave up meeting with the premiers and the provinces, he substituted one man's vision for a vision accommodating the perspective of all Canadians. He has either endowed himself with supernatural understanding or he has come to believe that consensus is not necessary. The Prime Minister makes light of consensus because he could not achieve consensus, not because it is worthless in Canadian terms. He must now embrace the dangerous fiction of the national will. He must now embarrass us as a nation by asking the British parliament to shut its eyes to the dissent he is unable to defuse and pass a Canada act. He sends his ministers to England to make sure that the British parliament does not make a qualitative judgment about the political process in our country.

If the Prime Minister persists in his unswerving course, he will leave behind him his constitutional settlement without the breadth of support which is required in a federal democracy. He hopes to settle this question forever. We can only hope he has not doomed this country to perpetual fractionalism, and that is the essence of this debate.

● (2010)

No consensus has been reached with the provinces. We are told it was impossible, and if it was not impossible then it is likely impossible now. If common sense ruled this debate rather than impatience, this package could have been taken to the provinces because when you look at it you will see it is not the package that was rejected in September. Many of the contentious issues which were there at the conference in September are not in that package now.

I have to be realistic. It appears that the Prime Minister is committed to pursuing his package here in the House of Commons and only here. I ask him and I ask his colleagues: will they use the House of Commons to build a more firm settlement for their constitutional arrangements, whatever is finally decided upon? Will they listen to and reflect on the views expressed by MPs who together represent a greater proportion of the population than the government majority

does? It would be in the best interest of this country if they did.

I want to turn to another point, and that is a matter which was raised earlier in the course of the day with regard to a procedural matter, particularly in questions put to the government House leader. My party has raised a number of questions about the procedural process we are to go through in adopting this resolution. Procedure bores people but it protects the rights of members to properly debate and amend a proposition before them.

What exactly do we now have here before us? We are debating whether we should set up a special committee to study, not a resolution, but the subject matter of a document containing a proposed resolution. When the committee makes its report, in whatever form, it will be suggesting amendments that should in its opinion be made when the resolution itself is brought back into the House. If the House concurs, the House will be concurring in the committee's report as to whether a resolution should be brought before the House and, if so, with what amendments. Never in this entire process do we deal directly with the resolution, and as a result of the procedure which has been outlined today we cannot any of us propose direct amendments. To fulfil the requirements of the rules of this House the government will have to introduce the resolution directly, have it debated directly, and pass it directly.

When this debate began we were told there would be no tricks. It looks to me as if the whole process is a pack of tricks. We have tried to get a clarification in this House of the process of passing a constitutional resolution; none has been forthcoming. However, last week a brochure was published by the government entitled "The Canadian Constitution: Explanation of a proposed Resolution respecting the Constitution of Canada". On page 18 of this booklet there is a statement which the government did not have the honesty to give in this House. It reads:

If the committee recommends the adoption of resolutions in the form of the proposed resolution, with or without changes, and both the House of Commons and the Senate concur in that recommendation, those concurrences will constitute a joint address. The government will then transmit the joint address to the Queen.

Let me make it clear that that will not constitute a joint address. Let me make the position of my party clear on this prostitution of the rules of the House of Commons. First, nothing can constitute a joint address unless it is a joint address. In the past such addresses were passed directly as resolutions and they must be now.

Second, we do not believe the House can deal indirectly with the subject matter of a resolution and then be deemed to have passed the resolution directly. If the government wants to change the rules it can introduce a temporary standing order to do that. It cannot sneak in through the back door.

Third, we do not accept that a majority of the House has the right to truncate the process of debate on this question any more than it can arbitrarily eliminate third reading of any particular bill.