

The Constitution

in addition, that the original peoples be given the right to direct representation and vote in the deliberations;

in addition, that multiparty delegations from the territories be given the right to direct representation and vote in the deliberations;

in addition, a delegation of women's organizations be given the right to direct representation and vote in the deliberations;

that a series of regional meetings be held by this group across Canada.

In effect this would bring the discussion on the constitution closer to the people of Canada. It is important to learn a few lessons from what has happened and to widen the negotiating process to include the government and the opposition here, the governments and the opposition parties of all legislatures, the legislatures of the two territories, the original peoples and women's organizations. In my opinion the constitution belongs to more than just 11 men. All the heads of government in this country happen to be men, and I am not sure that all the views of Canada with its divergent regions and people can be properly reflected in the process that has gone on until now.

I suggest to the government that we should broaden the process and that the process should be started as soon as possible. We should consider making serious changes to the resolution before us. We should dig out the repugnant section on the direct referendum to be organized solely and exclusively by the government. It strikes at the very essence of federalism. It can take away by referendum what has been given in a charter of rights in a time of emotional concern. We should entrench the philosophy of equalization payments so that there may be genuine equality of condition across the country. We should not have a double standard when it comes to federalism.

Sections 20 and 23 refer to the official languages, which is a very sensitive issue. If it is good enough for Parliament for us to define "where numbers warrant" concerning our institutions, programs and things we do, then surely in the name of equity, co-operative federalism and fairness, it is for the provinces to define "where numbers warrant" when it comes to education in minority languages rather than leaving it to the courts.

Finally changes are absolutely necessary in the area of resources so that there may be access to indirect taxation, concurrent powers with the provinces in international and interprovincial trade with federal paramountcy because it is international and interprovincial. There must be a clarification of resource ownership. I appeal to the government to seek such a consensus, to listen to all members of Parliament and indeed to some of its own backbenchers, some of whom are not happy at all with a number of matters in the resolution before us. I appeal to the government to listen to the people of Canada, the various provincial political parties both government and opposition from one coast to the other. If the government does this, perhaps it will be a very historic beginning, the beginning of a new Canada, not the end, or something which will turn out to be a very tragic nightmare.

I see the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) running out. I hope he heeds our words and makes some very serious changes to this resolution. If he does I assure him all Canada will applaud.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to follow such a distinguished member of the House as the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom), particularly after the remarks he made in closing when he indicated how important he thought it was to the country and its people that this Parliament be the focal point for this debate.

There is a certain moment in each decade and generation when events begin to converge and Parliament becomes the centre of the nation. In the past many commentators have assessed that Parliament is no longer the power it once was, that it is the executive, the cabinet, which is the centre of influence. Some have even suggested that there is a new level of government in Canada called the federal-provincial conference which makes the real decisions about how we are to be governed. I believe this debate once again shows how relevant and valuable an institution Parliament is. I for one am very glad that the debate has finally come to its proper home. The debate about the constitutional laws of this country is now outside the arena of the federal-provincial conference and in an arena where the full range of opinions and views in all regions can be heard, expressed, debated and discussed.

In the end, this is the place where the choice should be made. It should not be made around a table by 11 people who, though they represent regions, do not in any way represent the full range of opinions and views within those regions. As one of the western members on the government benches, I think it is very important that I express this other point of view which I, together with hundreds of thousands of western Canadians believe, was not expressed at the federal-provincial conference last September.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Axworthy: No one representing the provinces around that table whether it was Mr. Lougheed, Mr. Blakeney, Mr. Lyon or Mr. Bennett, spoke for the kind of political traditions and concerns which many of us from the west feel. I am not saying there are not others in this House who would not agree with the Lougheeds, the Bennetts and the Lyons, because we have already heard from the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) that he is basically taking the position of the provincial premiers. He spoke at great length about the Trojan horse. Well, Mr. Speaker, he is a horse of another colour. He is a stalking horse for the provincial premiers and he is simply representing their point of view once again, which is legitimate enough, there is no problem with that. It does mean we should be very careful and very cautious that we do not assume it is the only point of view which is being heard or expressed in the west, because there are many westerners who believe there is a need for a strong central government, that there is a need for a bill of rights, there is a need for repatriating the constitution, and they want action now. That was not a voice which was being heard at the conference or has yet been heard by members of the Conservative party in this House. In fact, what has really been heard is more the Cassandra-like wails of