

The Constitution

Speaker? I want to make the point that this is a departure from what I understand the rules to be. I do not know of any rule—subject to correction, naturally, from the Chair or the Table—that allows a member to carry on beyond the next available opportunity. Therefore, as I understand it, the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne) will be next followed by the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Lewis), at least with respect to this amendment. The member for Burnaby can speak on other amendments. I know of no right to reserve the time for him to speak at some later date. If there is such a right then it may have to be argued later, as I do not want to take up the time of the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi. I think the Chair would certainly have to point me to an authority.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): I think the matter can be handled easily. I am relying on my recollection. It is a very clear recollection I have of an incident where this occurred before and, in fact, what I indicated is what happened. But it is not a ruling. I am simply indicating my purpose for making the earlier comment. The Chair will undertake to ensure that I have not lost track of myself, or of the procedures. Over the dinner hour I will verify what I have indicated. If I am wrong then either myself or the next hon. member in the Chair will make sure the matter is corrected. As hon. members can see, I am relying on my memory with respect to a previous occasion.

I now recognize the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Mr. Speaker, since I waited what seems like a week and a half to start, if I do not finish before the dinner hour I will come back in about a week and a half to finish.

This is an historic debate, Mr. Speaker, and one in which I am proud to participate. I want to take this opportunity to thank my constituents for having afforded me the opportunity to participate. Many of those who have participated in this debate have congratulated and thanked the co-chairmen of the special joint committee for the work they have accomplished. I want to add my voice to those who have gone before. I want to congratulate all members who gave so much of their time and talent to this great task. I simply want to say "thank you" to all of them.

I said at the outset that this is an historic debate, so I sought some appropriate sentence with which to begin my remarks on the motion before us. At his inauguration John F. Kennedy said to his countrymen, "Let us begin anew, remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness and sincerity is always subject to proof." Therefore, in my remarks, I shall try to be civil and I will grant to all concerned in this debate the opportunity to prove their sincerity.

However, I do believe it is time to begin anew—time for Canada to take her place in the list of nations which are truly independent and truly sovereign. No longer should we have to go begging to some other nation to amend our Constitution or

ask some other nation to be the custodian of our individual rights and freedoms. I do not want to spend much time on the process, but rather on the substance.

I want to say I have no qualms of conscience about the Government of Canada wanting to remove the last vestiges of colonialism from this nation. Neither do I have any qualms about asking Great Britain to divest herself of any custodial charge over our Constitution, our rights and freedoms. Nor do I agree with those hon. members opposite who claim that any provincial legislature can speak for all Canadians, rather than the Parliament of Canada. I am proud that my party and my leader have taken both the initiative and the determination to make my country, at long last, truly independent—truly a nation.

We have heard a great deal about the need for consensus. Like motherhood, consensus is difficult to oppose. However, the arguments we continually hear in this place and in the press would lead one to believe that consensus is solely the responsibility of the national government and that the Government of Canada alone is responsible for achieving that consensus and any lack thereof is solely the fault of the national government. We have seen the continuous and constantly changing positions of the provinces making increased demands on the national government. Premier Hatfield, the dean of the premiers, has stated before the committee that consensus is not now possible and that it is never likely to be possible. But he correctly points out that this motion before us provides a two year period to achieve this consensus if all the players are truly serious. The Minister of Labour (Mr. Regan), himself a former premier, recently had this to say:

I was on the other side of the table as a provincial premier for eight years and I participated in a number of conferences dealing with patriation of our Constitution.

I saw the provinces demand more powers given by the federal government to the provinces before they would agree to bring home the Constitution.

I took part in the conference at Victoria, where we came closer than at any other time, before or since, to total agreement on bringing it home. In the end, Quebec disagreed and asked for some power which the other provinces wouldn't agree to. But the significant thing is that this September, when the provinces failed to agree with the federal government after the negotiations had continued all summer long, not one of the issues on which the disagreement occurred had even been a provincial demand or under consideration or on the table nine years earlier in Victoria. And so if we continue to negotiate for another ten or another 20 or another 30 years, there will always be new premiers, there will always be new demands, and there will never be the possibility of total agreement.

● (1840)

So much for the demand by some for one more first ministers' conference where supposedly all differences will be automatically forgotten, where there will be a love nest, and everyone will get together.

I should like to deal now with the substance of the motion, in particular with two or three items. First I should like to deal with language rights. Early in our history we decided against the melting pot theory of nationhood and opted, instead, for the maintenance of the language and culture of our two founding nationalities. The BNA Act and Section 23 of the Manitoba Act guaranteed language rights within the provinces of Quebec and Manitoba. The Official Languages Act of 1969