

Interim Supply

we can take pride in the fact that we are now grown up and can amend our constitution by ourselves? After all, there has never been any opposition from Westminster. That would certainly be a step in constitutional evolution; but what is the price we are going to be asked to pay for it? These are the questions I want to ask. It is too bad that the Minister of Justice is not here, and I trust he will note these questions. What price has been exacted by the provinces in order to get their unanimous consent? Why did the provinces of Saskatchewan and Quebec withdraw their previous objections? After all, these sessions were in camera and we do not know what bargaining went on. Have any of the provinces indicated already that they would like to proceed under section 94A; that they want to get into certain fields? Do they want to get into banking? After all, Alberta has taken certain steps in that regard. It may be that British Columbia will want to do so. Every one of the provinces, I think, may have some reason for wanting to come into the federal field. We would like to know the answers to these questions.

There is another point I would like to make in this regard. Not all the provinces will view these changes with equanimity. We know some of the provinces want to have as much power as they can get, or want more power for themselves, and that they would reduce the authority of the central government to a few limited spheres. Shall we say these are the extreme provincial rights people. On the other hand there are those who would have the government of Canada much stronger in order to give them opportunities for balancing out the economy. I think it is fair to say that probably the maritime provinces do not want to see a greatly weakened federal government. In any event, Mr. Chairman, may I conclude my remarks this afternoon with this quotation from an editorial which appeared in the *Toronto Star* of October 20:

It may be nothing short of a national disaster if parliament rubber-stamps the agreement reached last week between the federal and provincial premiers regarding the amendment of Canada's constitution.

Then further on the editorial says:

The agreement as it stands, in fact, represents a triumph for the extreme "provincial rights" faction which wishes to exalt the role of the provinces and reduce that of the federal government to a minimum. It could be a milestone in the breakup of confederation.

I cite this editorial as an example of the division of opinion that exists on this question. There are other citations I could put

[Mr. Lambert.]

before the committee. I have a goodly number of them. I have some from the *Winnipeg Free Press*. These two newspapers are not unfriendly to the present administration. That is why I believe we must ask these questions. Therefore I agree with this editorial when it says:

For this reason, it is essential that this agreement should not be hastily approved by parliament as so many dominion-provincial agreements have been. It needs to be given a very close, careful and critical examination by a qualified committee of the House of Commons, which should invite testimony by constitutional and other experts.

It is merely because this matter is so important that I make this plea that we get as much information as possible and that a very careful study be made of the agreement when it comes up for ultimate decision.

Mr. Nugent: Mr. Chairman, it is not often in the house that we are considering an action of the government which offers an appropriate stepping-stone for us all to take a look at the general trend of government action over the last while, to see whether there is any pattern emerging out of government action, to note the behaviour of the government and the provinces, what its present effect is on Canada and whether it gives any indication as to where similar action is likely to lead us in the future.

I certainly think that when the government has announced that it has reached an agreement with the provinces on a method of amending the constitution, all of us who take seriously our responsibilities as members of the Canadian House of Commons should discuss this question in a very broad terms and try the best we can to see whether there is any trend as to where we are going, with the piecemeal legislation that now and then comes up. I am sure we are all aware that now and then the government takes a step, or a measure is passed, which seems to nibble away at a freedom, which seems to limit the economic activity of certain people; and many times we shrug it off and say, "Well, it is necessary for the greatest good at this time that some slight inconvenience be experienced". But such nibbling away does add up to a general erosion of freedom; it can mean the weakening of the country as a whole, and certainly a gradual limitation of the power of the federal government to effect the economic welfare of the people of Canada generally can lead to the impotence of the government.

While this measure is not before us directly, I think now is a good time to take