

*Government Orders*

It means, effectively, that seven provinces representing at least 92 per cent of the population must approve any constitutional change before the federal government will consider giving its own stamp of approval.

That's a stiffer requirement than the seven provinces with 50 per cent of the population currently needed for most constitutional changes.

Forest Minister Andrew Petter, B.C.'s point man on the unity package, said Chrétien is putting a "straitjacket on Confederation" and accused him of making up his unity strategy "on the back of an envelope".

Truly that is exactly what the Prime Minister is doing. Yet the Liberal members, like sheep, will come to this House tonight, fall in line and vote for this straitjacket on the Canadian Constitution.

We have a situation where we are giving a veto. Perhaps I should stop for a second here and just detail my concept of what a veto is. Simply, if someone being one of many has a veto power and that person's vote was negative then that person would be able to stop the process in spite of the majority of the vote being positive. That is my understanding of the word veto.

• (1620)

What this Prime Minister has done is to give Canada's federal government constitutional veto over Canada's Constitution to the separatist government in Quebec. It is absolutely unbelievable. It is so unbelievable I have to repeat it: The Prime Minister is giving Canada's federal government constitutional veto over changes to Canada's Constitution to the separatist government in Quebec.

It goes beyond exasperation to think that those people would come back into this House tonight and actually vote that way simply because their Prime Minister says so. I should explain that there is a lot of embarrassment on the part of Liberals in the province of British Columbia because they have the misfortune of having the name Liberal. I will read from a column by an MLA candidate:

The federal government has made its spectacular move. In an effort to appease the disgruntled Quebec separatists, the Prime Minister is putting the true union of Canadian provinces at risk.

The thinly disguised 'veto to all' will leave Quebec in the position of stopping any constitutional changes, no matter how logical they may be. British Columbia, the fastest growing and third largest province has been pushed aside once more.

I say in parenthesis that this was written immediately prior to the extra inclusion of the veto for British Columbia, but the sentiments are exactly the same. This B.C. Liberal is trying to distance himself from the crazy federal Liberals. He goes on to say:

The unity committee, as designed by the Prime Minister, has one western Canadian representative—and she is from Edmonton. This committee now should be disbanded because Chrétien's latest move has made it redundant.

The 'distinct society' clause will enshrine a special status for a small section of our society and will inflame relations with Quebec for years to come.

Liberals, this is a Liberal speaking.

The Prime Minister has no inkling as to what makes Canada tick! He is completely out of touch!

The Charlottetown accord of 1992 was defeated because of the inclusion of this type of special treatment.

I wonder who the minister of western alienation is? This individual is doing a commendable job!

This was said by a B.C. Liberal candidate. However what does the B.C. Liberal leader say? When he was interviewed on December 6 the questioner asked: "You have no embarrassment though that they are Liberals and you are a Liberal in name?" The B.C. Liberal leader wanted to distance himself from these people over here because he said: "Our party is totally separate from the federal party. I am embarrassed for British Columbia that they are not standing up in Parliament and speaking up for the interests of British Columbia, which is what I believe their task is".

**Mr. Hermanson:** It is a different story if you are trying to get elected.

**Mr. Abbott:** It is absolutely amazing. It would be even more instructive if we were to take the words of the self-declared constitutional expert, the man from Vancouver Quadra. I will quote from an article dated November 30 where he acknowledges the regional veto system was resurrected from a constitutional conference in 1971. It may have come about for no other reason than because "someone in the Prime Minister's office mentioned it and nobody happened to point out that what worked in 1971 would not work now. I think it is as simple as that". That is what the member for Vancouver Quadra said to a reporter in Vancouver on November 30. It will be very instructive to visualize how this member will end up voting later in the day.

Why do we get there? The Prime Minister panicked because he had a totally worthless plan for trying to fight the referendum. That is the only reason we get there. We have a Prime Minister who has no vision and is out of touch. Quite frankly, it is my judgment and apparently the judgment of all my colleagues in the House that the Prime Minister should seriously reconsider his future in the role of Prime Minister of Canada. He has no vision.

• (1625)

I will quote from another authority. I consider this person to be an authority because as the former premier of Newfoundland from 1979 to 1989, Brian Peckford went through a tremendous number of constitutional wars. He points out something very subtle here:

Furthermore there are other problems with what is being proposed. In a ruling in September 1981, the Supreme Court of Canada said about a federal unilateral initiative to patriate and change the Constitution that it was inconsistent with the conventions of the Constitution which required the substantial consent of the provinces. This ruling is significant for at least two reasons: