

The first ministers when meeting in November agreed that in my tour I should see what the prospects were of intensifying and accelerating, as they put it, the process of Senate reform, and the Prime Minister committed himself to a meeting in November of this year in western Canada to open discussions on Senate reform. At that time the Government of Canada will put forward a proposal based on an elected Senate.

Premier Vander Zalm, as the honourable senator knows, has put forward a proposal that would proclaim all of those aspects of the Meech Lake Accord that require only seven provinces with 50 per cent of the population and would put off proclamation of the others pending an agreement on Senate reform.

I think I have given a full report on the extent to which Senate reform has figured in my discussions to date. Essentially, Senate reform is a second-round issue, and it was identified as such by the provincial premiers who met in August of 1986 in Edmonton.

● (1440)

Senator MacEachen: I take it then that the idea of including Senate reform in a parallel accord is not of interest either to the provincial premiers or to the Government of Canada, but that it would be a future round that would be the context in which Senate reform would be dealt with.

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, with the exception of Premier Wells, who has put forward his own design and would like to see it adopted by all governments, and Premier Vander Zalm, whose proposal would have Senate reform intervene, as it were, in the proclamation of the various provisions of the Meech Lake Accord, there has been no suggestion that we could achieve a reformed Senate prior to ratification of the Meech Lake Accord. I do not believe that, as a practical matter, governments believe we could do that in that time frame.

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—PARALLEL ACCORD—GOVERNMENT POSITION RE CONTENTS OF AGREEMENTS

Hon. H.A. Olson: I have a supplementary question. Has the federal government, particularly the minister who is directly responsible, given any indication of what the government is willing to have in a parallel accord?

From what I have heard so far, the federal government and, indeed, the Premier of Quebec have said that they are not going to give one inch—I guess you have to say “one millimetre” now—with respect to what is in the Meech Lake Accord; but if we all agreed to pass it we could then consider what might be in a parallel accord. Of course, the hooker in that is that the parallel accord could not deal with any of those matters in the Meech Lake Accord at the moment because there is a condition that that be passed intact—for whatever reasons have been given, such as that it would unravel.

Many Canadians believe that some of these things that came out in the dead of night and were included in this package cannot be changed even by the insertion or deletion of one comma. Has the federal government given any indication of whether it is willing to deal with some modifications? If it is

[Senator Murray.]

not willing to consider any modifications—not one “inch”, if that is the right word—is that the basis on which the honourable senator goes about the country negotiating this matter?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, my honourable friend has not been paying his customary close attention.

First, with regard to the parallel accord concept advanced by Premier McKenna, I have employed his definition, which is that such an accord would add to but not subtract from Meech Lake.

So far as the possible content of a parallel accord is concerned, I have enumerated quite a list of subjects that could be discussed in connection with a parallel accord and might—in fact, probably would and should—find their way into any eventual accommodation with regard to Meech Lake. Among those subjects that I have mentioned on numerous occasions as I moved around the country are: minority language rights, a matter brought up in the New Brunswick report and mentioned, naturally, by the various minority language groups such as Alliance Quebec and Les Francophones du Québec; aboriginal constitutional rights, a matter brought up in both the New Brunswick and Manitoba reports and brought forward, of course, by representatives of the aboriginal people; possible enhancement of the status of multiculturalism in our Constitution, a matter raised by, among others, the Ontario Legislative Committee; the concerns expressed by the governments and people of the Yukon and Northwest Territories; equality rights; and the Charter in general. Perhaps I have not, today, repeated the entire list to which I have referred in my travels, but those are some of the subjects I have enumerated on many occasions as forming part of the discussions of a parallel accord and part of any eventual accommodation with regard to Meech Lake.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, I am sure the Leader of the Government would agree that of those subject matters he has just enumerated—and I would be pleased to have a complete list of that, if possible—not one deals with those matters in the Meech Lake Accord.

Senator Murray: You are wrong again.

Senator Olson: Then I take it the federal government must have the whole of the Meech Lake Accord without even one comma changed and that we must take the bundle the way it is because you are unwilling to deal with, or announce in advance, some of the matters that concern a large number of people.

I will give one or two examples. One is the straitjacket of constitutional amendment that we will be putting back on. Another important matter is the devolution of authority respecting that part of the federal spending power that is incorporated in the Meech Lake Accord. Have you indicated a willingness to modify those things? They are of great concern to a number of people who would like to do everything that can be done but who are not willing to go so far as to adopt, without any modification, what is in Meech Lake now.