

The Constitution

national reconciliation as Canadians work to improve their standard of living and quality of life.

The provinces, like the federal Government, would now have a veto power over a limited range of constitutional changes affecting Parliament, the Supreme Court, the creation of new provinces or the extension of present provinces into the Territories. These institutions belong to the Canadian people and are the basic national elements of our Confederation. It seems only fair that they should not be altered without the agreement and concurrence of all the partners to our Confederation.

Through the conciliatory genius of the Prime Minister, and the goodwill of all the First Ministers of the provinces, there is an explicit recognition that French Canada is not confined to Quebec, nor is English Canada confined to the other provinces. While recognizing the reality of the distinctive nature of Quebec, all 11 Governments are committed to the protection of the country's two language communities.

Under this Accord, the federal Government will have to provide reasonable cash compensation to any province that opts out or does not participate in the future cost shared program in an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. It is important in considering this concept that we bear in mind that we are talking about an area of exclusive provincial jurisdiction which may be part of a national scheme in which a provincial Government may not wish to participate. The exclusivity of the provincial jurisdiction, in my view, justified the willingness and desirability of the federal Government to be bound by rules of behaviour in someone else's house.

Under these circumstances, the federal Government will provide reasonable cash compensation if the opting out province undertakes initiatives or programs of its own that are compatible with national objectives.

A quick look at our Canadian history suggests to us that some of our greatest landmarks in social legislation were accomplished before the Constitution was amended in 1982 and when each province felt it had a veto power, not just over the limited range mentioned in the present Accord, but over every federal program which invaded provincial jurisdiction. Despite this, an important amendment was won, passed in England, which resulted in unemployment insurance. Our health care system, which is a model to the whole world, was put in place composed of hospital care and medicare during the same period.

It might well be argued that the Government closest to the people, the provincial authority, is best qualified to administer a national program and tailor it to the particular needs of Canadians who reside within the provincial jurisdiction. I think it can be argued that this is preferable to rigid uniformity.

All of our great national programs have come into being because there was a national consensus that the Canadian people wanted them put in place. Consultation and co-operation between federal and provincial had always resulted in better laws better administered.

I suggest that it is preferable in federal programs to spell out goals and objectives clearly with the specific means and details being worked out with reference to the particular characteristics that exist in the regions of Canada. For example, the design of a daycare system in our only bilingual Province of New Brunswick must surely be different from the design of a daycare system in Metropolitan Toronto, Vancouver or Whitehorse.

● (1720)

From 1950 to 1975, Canada experienced the greatest period of expansion and development in its history. Canada stands today at the apex of its power and influence, having witnessed in the third quarter of this century some tremendous milestones in human achievement.

We have today the lowest infant mortality rate in our history, more young Canadians in post-secondary educational institutions than ever before, and a life-span that has been extended by 10 years. These achievements are in great measure the result of milestones of social legislation which have been put in place by the will of the Canadian people and the good faith of our leaders, both federal and provincial.

The reality is that following the economic reversals of the mid-1970s, the federal Government has not been able to achieve any major redistribution of wealth without the co-operation and assistance of the provinces. There is, however, much that the federal Government can do and will do to improve the standard of living of Canadians, particularly those who live below the poverty line. However, there is much more that the Government of Canada can do in step with the provinces.

Even though the federal Government spends billions of dollars annually on programs under provincial jurisdiction such as those funded by Established Programs Financing, many legal authorities looked upon this as a move into the grey area of constitutional concern. Parliamentarians may recall the court challenges arising from the federal Government Bill in 1983 that withheld medicare funds from provinces that allowed extra billing or hospital user-fees. The Meech Lake Accord does much to clarify this point.

Prime Minister Diefenbaker was the champion of the underdog and put his indelible mark on Canadian history with a Bill of Rights. Prime Minister Trudeau, by indomitable will and force of intellect, gave Canada a new Constitution. The present Prime Minister, by tireless diplomacy, has completed the act of Confederation and has established a strong and unified Constitution that is evolving and developing and serving the reality of Canada.

This Accord demonstrates once again that when the chips are down, Canadian leaders put Canada first. Our young nation now marches forward into the 21st century, a century that will belong to Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kempling): Questions? Debate.