

The Constitution

and regional reflection in some of the regulatory boards which play such an important role in this country. We talked about reform of the Supreme Court. We talked about reform of this institution. We talked about restoring the role intended for private members when this institution had its beginning, allowing them a meaningful contribution to the policy-making process and allowing them to keep an effective check on what the government was doing. But I ask hon. members whether they have heard any speaker over the last five weeks talk about these things. I say we have not.

We are talking now about a charter of rights which is to be the solution to all problems which have faced this nation since confederation. We no longer talk about the need and the failure of the Senate to fulfil this crucial role intended for it under confederation to represent minorities and protect them from the tyranny of the majority inherent in a direct democracy process, such as that which is the usual role of the House of Commons. The Senate was to bring a regional voice to represent regions in a different way from what Members of Parliament can do. As well, the Senate was to be a conciliator between the central government and the provinces in cases where there is an impasse in certain matters. The Senate has never filled that role, and so we have these problems throughout Canada because there is no effective spokesman for legitimate regional concerns.

We talked about electoral reform. Why did we talk about that? Obviously we talked about it because it is not right for a government to have no representation in half of the country. In the government there are only two representatives of one province of western Canada. That is not a good situation.

There are better ways of electing a parliament to ensure that the vote a government or a leading political party receives in a certain region is adequately reflected in terms of representation in the House. It is not a healthy situation for the Official Opposition not to be represented in one province which has over 25 per cent of the population. That is why we talked about electoral reform and that is why we made promises to the people of Quebec during the referendum.

We talked about reform and equality in terms of regulatory bodies. We talked about the inequity of having Supreme Court judges appointed disproportionately from certain regions of the country while other regions are almost completely shut out. We talked about reforms to the procedures of the House of Commons. That debate is no longer relevant nor is it going on. We have now found another solution to the problems of Canada. That solution is something termed by our Prime Minister some time ago as "a new society." We no longer concern ourselves with the fundamental things that I have talked about. We are now making some fundamental changes in terms of a charter of rights, a new contract, which will profoundly and fundamentally change the relationship between the individual and the state.

The problems which the Prime Minister is trying to solve with his charter of rights are now new. The tensions and crises we are trying to overcome are not new. They have been with us since confederation. In terms of nationhood, 113 years is a

short period of time. It is fascinating to read our history. It is fascinating to learn that Canada has lived in a sort of suspended state of disintegration ever since confederation. For instance, in 1868, one year after confederation, one of the four partners, namely the province of New Brunswick, held a referendum and voted to leave confederation. It was not satisfied with the results of the arrangement. My province of British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871. We were not an unorganized territory as were some of the other regions which joined confederation later. British Columbia was a Crown colony, as was Newfoundland when it joined. All of our political leaders felt, as most of us now feel, that the interests of British Columbia would be much better served through the wider concept of a great confederation of which the then prime minister spoke at the time. There were tensions even then. We all know that British Columbia did not pay as much attention to the fact that it should be properly represented in the Senate as part of the deal to join confederation, such as the other provinces did. We joined confederation on the promise of a railway from coast to coast, reaching all the way to Victoria.

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Few people today know that the Liberal government which followed that of Sir John A. Macdonald tried to renege on that promise to build a railway to British Columbia. In fact, an offer of settlement was made to British Columbia to buy back that promise for \$750,000. B.C. rejected that offer and insisted that the terms under which it joined confederation be met.

There were threats of secession even then. There was uneasiness in British Columbia. We felt we had been cheated and that central Canada really was not serious in making us an equal partner in confederation. So serious were the noises from the west that Lord Dufferin was despatched to British Columbia to ease the tensions and to settle some of the disputes that had arisen. He wrote the following to the Prime Minister:

At this moment British Columbia is obsessed by a frenzied sense, however unreasonable, of injury and wrong.

This frenzied sense of wrong still exists in Canada today. It exists in the west and is aggravated by the colonial attitudes, which have developed over the years, of central Canada toward the west. There is preferential treatment for consumers in central Canada. They were protected by preferential freight rates against high costs of east-west trade. There has been preferential treatment for central Canadian businesses. They were protected against the high costs of shipping to the west by tariffs and trade restrictions.

So serious was the dissension in western Canada at that time that one of the people who led the movement to bring the colony into confederation, Amor De Cosmos, said in this House as a Member of Parliament that he heard, as we do now, his province described as greedy and insulted in many other ways. This same man said the following on February 13, 1879, and any member can go to the Library and look this up at page 1079 of *Hansard* of that date: