

The Constitution

got its denominational schools and the maritime provinces benefited from the redistribution of wealth from the more prosperous provinces.

It is this unequal treatment that allows each province to be distinct in its own way, but this should not be confused with Quebec's individuality. The distinctiveness of Quebec is not an issue here. No one surely who is familiar with our nation would deny Quebec its unique character.

The issue is how do we incorporate Quebec's distinct identity into our Constitution. Unfortunately, the issue has been fraught with emotion, but if we are to resolve it, we must approach it from a reasonable and a compassionate point of view.

In my opinion, the new distinct society clause is a much improved version over its predecessor, the Meech Lake Accord, because it makes clear that Quebec's distinct society refers to its French-speaking majority, its unique culture and its system of civil law.

I believe that New Brunswickers and Atlantic Canadians as a whole are fair and reasonable people. We recognize the contribution of Quebec to Canada's identity and we remain confident that an accommodation can be reached with Quebec.

For Atlantic Canada, the issues of prosperity and unity are directly linked. A Canada without Quebec would have serious repercussions for the Atlantic provinces. There would be geographical isolation. There would be a tendency to gravitate to the United States. What are the implications of those types of moves?

It would mean that Atlantic Canadians would have no equalization payments. It would mean that there would be no medicare as we know it today. There would be no support for post-secondary education. There would be no regional development, and there would be no unemployment insurance. There would be no support programs for our agricultural community.

The list goes on. If this were not the unity debate one might think that I was speaking from the platform of the Reform Party from the west, because indeed those are the very things they would have us do away with in Atlantic Canada.

Even if the remaining Canadian provinces somehow regroup, I doubt very much that it is reasonable to

assume that the philosophy of equalization would apply. I doubt that very much.

Although the extent of our dependence on the federal government is not something that we are proud of, the fact of the matter is that Atlantic Canada relies on the federal government for its economic well-being more than any other region of the country.

For example, we are a net beneficiary of transfer payments. This year New Brunswick is forecasted to receive \$875 million in equalization payments; \$198 million under the Canada Assistance Plan; and \$550 million under Established Programs Financing. These major transfers account for 39 per cent of New Brunswick's revenues.

Loss of these and other transfer payments would surely result in a decline in our standard of living. There would be substantial emigration from our region. It would have a ripple effect on local economies whose pools of skilled labour would be depleted. It would discourage businesses from relocating to our region and youth would emigrate from our area as surely as the robins fly south in the winter, only not to return. Atlantic Canada would become an area, a region of geriatrics.

I want to emphasize that New Brunswick does not want to remain a have not province. We want to decrease our dependency on the federal government. We want to develop our economy to the fullest extent.

We want to be contributing partners in the federation. But to do so we need the leadership of the federal government. We must recognize that one strong undivided Canada is essential to the economic health of New Brunswick and Atlantic Canada.

The government's proposal to eliminate provincial trade barriers is a positive step. Trade is the life-blood of New Brunswick and it makes no sense to have a free trade agreement with the United States when we erect trade barriers within Canada. We have already taken steps in the maritime provinces to tear down trade barriers. We must do the same throughout the rest of Canada.

We believe that our central institutions must be revamped. They have not necessarily served us in a beneficial manner and for that reason we believe that a reformed Senate is indeed in the best interests of