

The Constitution

Canada, we define what is an adequate consensus. We suggest that an adequate consensus could fall between those two extremes, which would be a consensus composed of two-thirds of the provinces enjoying at least 50 per cent of the population. People could argue that the consensus should be wider. I accept that argument. What I am saying is that you cannot have a consensus which ignores or refutes either extreme. It is because of that attempt by us to define consensus that we have moved an amendment to Section 63.

Let us consider the amending formula itself. In order to reach agreement, obviously both sides to an issue have to give, to compromise somewhat. It has been interesting to note that the premiers took that first step by putting forward an amending formula which, they believe, both reflects the consensus and represents an amending formula that will work.

How many members of this House remember the day, and I will not give the entire quotation, when the Prime Minister asked if we had heard Premier Peckford say we could patriate before he got jurisdiction over the offshore resources? He talked about Premier Lougheed. He asked whether Premier Lougheed would be willing to patriate with an amending formula before he got jurisdiction over resources. He went on to refer to the various premiers. I say through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Prime Minister and members of this House that the premiers did just that. What they did was to say they are willing to accept an amending formula with patriation. It is now up to the Prime Minister, I would suggest, there being other issues which have to be discussed in terms of a renewal of the federation, to sit down and see if that compromise cannot, in fact, be found.

Let me refer now to the amending formula. I will not go through all the flaws of the Victoria formula, but on running through them very quickly one sees immediately that there is to be a veto for two provinces, Ontario and Quebec. In a federation there is to be a veto for two members; the other eight do not have the power of the veto. Even if the population of one of the two provinces falls below 25 per cent of the national population, having once had the veto the province will always have it. The unfairness of the situation becomes evident very quickly.

I would ask members of the NDP, most of whom come from western Canada—26 of their 32 members—when they go back to western Canada, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, do they say to their constituents they must accept third-class status? Do they say they feel an amending formula is right which creates different classes of provinces and through that different classification of provinces different citizens? How do they defend that? They do not defend it because they cannot.

The Victoria formula not only is outdated, it is wrong, it is unfair and it does not work. If members opposite want to continue with that formula, I say to them what they are perpetuating is a centralized system which, in a sense, drives the far reaches of the country away from the centre. For those of us who want a strong national government it is wrong to just give lip service to a strong national government without giving

the regions a reason to feel they are part of the central decision-making ability. They must have that ability.

The hon. member for Kitchener (Mr. Lang), who is a jocular fellow and does not see beyond his own nose, can see this only in the perspective of his own province. I suggest that he see it in the perspective of Atlantic Canada, in the perspective of western Canada and see it in the perspective of Canada itself.

I have said earlier, as have other members of our caucus, the Vancouver formula needed further refining. It has gone through further refining. What it does is create an amending formula whereby all the provinces are regarded as equal. It is not only important that the provinces be regarded as equal, it is important that Canadians be regarded as equal.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Epp: On the question of opting out, I hear members opposite say some would opt out and we would have a checkerboard Canada. That is a very glib and easy term to use. Was it the government of hon. members opposite which brought in the Canada Pension Plan but also allowed for the Quebec Pension Plan? Are hon. members opposite who come from Quebec in the Canada Pension Plan or in the Quebec Pension Plan?

• (2040)

Mr. Clark: Checkerboard.

Mr. Epp: A checkerboard. Why? Was it because it was convenient, because it worked, or because we would not have had a Canada Pension Plan without it? Of course all of us want a strong national government, but let us be realistic; those kinds of checkerboards have existed in the Canadian federation.

What is opting out? I think it is important for us to define that as well because hon. members opposite are now using a new term, which is "incremental sovereignty-association". I think that new term has been in vogue since last Thursday. The provinces are saying that if the amending formula is used to take powers away from the provinces—not powers granted to them but powers agreed to at the time of confederation—at that time and at that time only can they opt out of those amendments. In dealing with such matters as resources or provincial boundaries are hon. members saying, for instance, that should the Labrador boundary be changed, Newfoundland should not be able to opt out of that kind of arrangement?

So the one question which comes up is the question of the charter of rights. I want to say here again—I have said it before and other members have said it—that not just since this discussion came up but back in the days of the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker and in the days of the general conventions of this party this federal party has endorsed an entrenched charter of rights. That is not a new position. That is a position this party has taken for a long time.