

*Supply*

assurance to Members of the House, on behalf of the Government, that in these two important areas our commitment remains to achieve progress and to work towards that priority.

The Hon. Member for Oshawa alluded to the process which is taking place with respect to this particular matter. I think it is important for us to put this into context. Some people have said that this particular Accord is not receiving the kind of debate it should. I think the facts are that this particular Accord has and will receive by far the most complete and intensive consideration of any political accord with respect to our Constitution in the history of our country.

I want to remind Hon. Members that in 1980, 1981 and 1982, we were in an evolutionary period with respect to constitutional change. They will recall that until 1982 the whole question of constitutional change in law, practice and convention was really a unilateral function of the federal Parliament. There was reference in some judicial pronouncements that there should be some consultation and agreement where actions were taken that might impact on the legislative capacity of a province but, in reality, when the last province was added to our country this was a unilateral action taken by the federal Government without consultation with other provinces. So I think it is important to note that we have progressed in constitutional terms to 1982 when the inclusion of additional provinces was in fact a matter which required the consensus of provincial legislatures, and also the consent of those legislatures representing over 50 per cent of the population of Canada.

Therefore, I take it that the New Democratic Party is not taking the position that when we deal with matters of national institutions and the creation of new provinces, and when we talk about giving self-government to aboriginal peoples, we should move back to the point that unilateral action can be taken by the federal Government. I take it that indeed the NDP supports the idea that provincial participation and consultation in these important issues is fundamental in modern Canada.

I wanted to put that in context, because it seems to me that when we debate this issue, we need to remember that the last time we had a constitutional amendment, in 1982, there was no debate by the provinces and no debate with respect to any provisions which took place, except on the floor of the House of Commons and in the Senate of Canada. The agreement was finally put together, as history tells us, in a kitchen, with the exclusion of the important Province of Quebec. It was negotiated in the dead of night between the provinces, with the exception of Quebec, and manifested itself in an Accord which was not signed by Quebec. It was simply put to us in Parliament and we were asked "yea or nay". There was no subsequent discussion about the elements which went into the compromise arrived at in the night without the participation of Quebec. There were no debates in the provinces with respect to that matter because all that was required was a joint address of the Senate and the House of Commons with respect to that particular amendment.

We are now moving to a point where we not only will have a discussion here on the floor of the House of Commons, but there is also a provision—this will be negotiated between the House Leaders of the various Parties in this place, that is an appropriate method of dealing with this matter—for each of the provinces, in all regions of Canada, to debate and discuss this matter. A more complete process has never been undertaken for constitutional change in Canada.

On the political side, and I do not want to get myself involved in the legal arguments which will be addressed with respect to matters before the court, but speaking in terms of the interests of people who live in the Territories, I want to say that the matter we have before us is a matter arrived at by unanimous consent in trying to reflect the realities of Canada today. I do not think anyone can challenge the fact that my Party and this Government have taken a leadership role with respect to devolution in the Territories and with respect to ensuring that, as quickly as possible, we move forward in this area of the Territories controlling their own destiny and attaining provincial status.

• (1210)

In terms of what we have before us, the reality is simply this. Part of this arrangement, which was in effect a discussion of what will happen in the future, is a constitutional recognition that whenever one talks in terms of additional provinces within our country, regardless of the government in power at any particular time, there must be the fullest understanding and consensus of all provinces with respect to such admission or creation. Indeed, the provision for unanimity addresses the reality of today. We are entering into a new phase in federal-provincial relations.

When was the last time in Canada that we could have attained such accord? When was the last time we saw representatives from all political Parties moving forward cooperatively to strengthen our country and to give a proper recognition to all its regions? Could one have visualized two or three years ago constitutionalizing a process by which every year there would be a meeting of First Ministers with an agenda regarding constitutional amendment?

What an opportunity for Canada to move forward in terms of the development of the north! In the Northwest Territories there is an internal discussion going on now with respect to boundaries and the division of the Northwest Territories into two separate Parties. I simply say that we now have an opportunity to move forward in this area. We have a new spirit of co-operation, a new spirit of confederation. I say to Hon. Members opposite in the New Democratic Party that this is an opportunity for us to move forward in this spirit of co-operation to serve the legitimate and proper aspirations and purposes of the people within the territories of our country.

I should point out that there is also a protection built into this unanimous provision in the Constitution, inasmuch as it will not be possible for intrusion into the Territories by existing provinces wishing to expand their boundaries into that area of