

*Speech from the Throne*

peevish, sometimes a product of genuine concern, will be heard in public.

We can expect increasing amounts of the energy of western Canadians to be devoted to the task of answering that question for themselves and for the rest of the country in terms of public policy and in terms of constitutional arrangements over the next several months. It is my concern, as a Canadian and as a westerner, to attempt to ensure that this process takes place within the context of attempting to strengthen this nation rather than attempting to tear it apart.

I want to remind the House that the same process in Quebec began within the context of attempting to rebuild our nation on firmer foundations and eventually, in part, but obviously not entirely, because of the insensitivity on the part of successive governments in Ottawa, a major portion of that effort became channelled off into the attempt to destroy confederation rather than rebuild it.

I begin my analysis by attempting to define the political reality in Canada for the west. The rhetoric has always been that the west is an equal partner in confederation. It now appears to westerners that this statement has little foundation in fact.

A year after Manitoba had been dubbed the first daughter of confederation it had become apparent that she was only to be an ignored stepchild. Similarly, when the Northwest Territories were dragged into confederation and later divided into provinces, their duties, rights and responsibilities were dictated to them by the imperial power of Canada, represented by eastern politicians. Western Canada took no part in the negotiations leading to its assimilation into confederation. Western Canada was developed to provide markets for eastern industrialists who were being shut out of world markets by Britain's decrease in imperial preferences and by the United States' unwillingness to maintain low tariff areas. From its birth, western Canada has been forced to accept a second-class colonial status within a political system which was never designed to give real regional security or effective power to areas of lower population.

There are 45 prairie Members of Parliament, compared with 88 Ontario members and 74 Quebec members. It is this lack of political clout in Ottawa and a total lack of understanding or even of attention on the part of the federal government which has led to present western alienation. The west has reached a stage both economically and culturally at which it can now devote itself to matters other than simple survival. It can no longer accept an inferior colonial status, particularly one which is camouflaged by the rhetoric of equality. Having seen through the rhetoric, the west is demanding to be partners on an equal footing.

Western discontent is not a new phenomenon. Many of the demands being expressed today bear a close resemblance to those expressed over half a century ago: lowering of tariffs, establishment of an equitable freight rate policy, the development of a national agricultural policy, and so on. The list of problems has simply become longer: oil, the cost-price squeeze, the need to share equally in the industrialization of the nation, bilingualism, rural depopulation, vertical integration.

[Mr. Rowland.]

Until recently the frustration which resulted from the failure of successive Liberal and Conservative governments to deal adequately with the problems of the west was channelled into various new western political parties and movements whose aims were to find a political voice for the west within Canadian confederation. But for several years now, western discontent has taken a new tack and has begun to adopt, if not the aims then at least some of the slogans and terminology of the separatist movement in Quebec. There is an increasing tendency for many westerners to view Ottawa as an enemy, as an alien force, rather than as their government. Increasing numbers of western Canadians would prefer going it alone to continuing a subservient or backwoods type of "cousin Clem" relationship with the rest of Canada.

The west has always provided fertile ground for new political concepts. Interestingly enough, in the past the political movements which have resulted from western ferment have placed great emphasis upon the role of the federal government. The west was the home of the Progressives, the United Farmers of Alberta, the CCF and Social Credit. Today, new movements attempting to provide solutions to the problems of the west, and existing institutions examining the same set of problems, are becoming more inward looking and are becoming characterized by regional particularism.

It would be edifying for members of this House to look at the expressed objectives of such organizations as the new west task force, the western parliament advocates, the western Canada movement, the Dominion of Canada party, the Mid-Can Businessmen's Association, and at the strongly worded motions by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the Alberta Federation of Agriculture and the Western Union of Municipalities, to study the feasibility of secession.

Perhaps I can best illustrate the current temper of the west by giving a personal example. A few years ago, like, I suspect, most westerners, I considered myself to be a Canadian first and a westerner second. I happened to live in Winnipeg or Regina but I could just as easily have lived in Halifax or Toronto. More recently, however, to my great regret I find myself increasingly forced into a position of considering myself to be a westerner first and a Canadian second. Certainly, all members of this House will be able to see the dangers to the continued unity of this country inherent in such changes of attitude.

Let me make it very clear that I reject the concept of separatism, whether for the west or for any other region of Canada. To me, continued western Canadian participation in Canadian federalism is unquestionable. Certainly, separation or even political union of the west within confederation would not lead to the elimination of the frustrations westerners are experiencing in the present political system. It is crucial, both from the point of view of the well-being of westerners and from the point of view of the welfare of the country as a whole, that we do not allow westerners' frustration to allow them to become trapped into the attempt to find a nationalist or regionalist solution to their problems. My stand in this regard is firm, but this does not mean that in the next months and years the nationalist option will not be closely examined by westerners unless very rapidly there is evidence forthcoming from Ottawa of a genuine change of heart and attitude.