

*Supply*

stopped in its tracks. That is a disastrous scenario regarding the Meech Lake Accord which, upon reflection, I do not share.

Is there an alternative to those two views? I think it is possible to take a much more studied and balanced view of the constitutional Accord. I think it is important to have a more realistic view.

● (1730)

I want to focus in on a key element of the Accord which has concerned me, that being federal spending power. There is an interesting clause in the Accord which says that provinces will have the right to opt out of federal programs if they choose to put in place a compatible program. We will have national programs out of which the provinces can opt out. They can receive federal dollars to establish their own programs.

That is a key element of the Accord. I want to be sure that with this clause in the Constitution we can still create new national programs which will serve the needs of ordinary Canadians. We in this Party have a long and proud history of fighting for the social needs of Canadians. It was through the efforts of our predecessors in this Party that the medicare program came to be. The national pension programs are dear to our hearts. It is important that the capacity of the federal Government to initiate remains.

I took the time not only to read the words in the document but also to consult with people who have negotiated between the federal and provincial Governments. I asked them whether they thought we could still establish national programs such as a day care program. I took the time to speak to constitutional lawyers who have a handle on the legal aspects of the Constitution.

I must be frank and say that I got quite a variety of points of view. You get different points of view from different experts but in the final analysis, as an elected representative, one must reflect on all the data and make a judgment. I made an evaluation of this clause.

I think that this clause fundamentally writes in constitutional language that which has become the constitutional practice in the country. That is, when a federal Government chooses to establish a social program it will sit down with the provinces and negotiate the program. That is fundamentally what has happened in this country. The federal Government has not unilaterally established new programs and imposed them upon the provinces regardless of what the provinces said.

In the past, provinces have had a say in the way in which programs were developed. The extent to which they have had a say varied depending upon their financial capacity. The influence of the federal Government results from the fact that it was willing to put money on the table to establish new programs. Therefore, a province such as Ontario could be much more independent in its point of view. It could tell the federal Government to keep its money, that it is not interested in what the federal Government was proposing.

However, provinces like Manitoba or the maritime provinces which do not have the same kind of revenue need federal dollars and will be more inclined to negotiate to have the needs of their people met. Such underlying sociological realities will continue to affect constitutional negotiations for the establishment of new programs.

Fundamentally, the effectiveness of federal spending power to create new programs will remain. In the past, the federal Government had the spending power and the provincial Governments had the jurisdiction. The two bodies sat down together and negotiated to create a national program. In the future the federal Government will have a constitutional right to establish national objectives and the provinces will be asserting their right to establish standards for programs within their areas of jurisdiction. There will still be a process of negotiation to establish new national programs.

I contend that nothing fundamental has changed with the Accord. It is still possible to create new national programs and it still must be done through negotiation. We have written into the Constitution that which has been the practice over the last few years.

I think things will depend upon the quality of leadership in the country. If we elect political Parties which are committed to establishing programs that will meet basic human needs and which follow through on those commitments when elected, we will have good national programs. They will, of course, have to be negotiated with the provincial Government. While some provincial Governments may be able to hold out and weaken a program in some cases, other provincial Governments will be creative and find ways to improve programs.

I would like to make a point about the positive aspects of this Accord and another about how the Accord could be improved. We have established that the Accord does not make this country ungovernable, that we can still, with good political leadership, establish national programs. One of the advantages of the Accord is that it completes the circle, with Quebec signing the Canadian Constitution. In addition to that, it demonstrates to Canadians who live in Quebec that people across Canada have opened the door to them. Provincial leaders from across Canada have devised an Accord which makes room for Quebec in the Canadian Constitution. There has, therefore, been an opening of spirit to Quebec.

The Accord also recognizes the sociological reality that Quebec is unique, that the majority of its population speaks the French language. In this country we must celebrate our differences, we must recognize that our differences add to the value of our culture. We must do this while recognizing that we have a common Canadian citizenship of which we are proud.

My final point is that this Accord can be improved. The Premiers have said that the amending requirements of the Accord, such as the unanimity principle, do not put constitutional change in a strait-jacket. Let us call upon the Premiers to demonstrate that. If that is true for the future, it must also