

The Consensus Report is not a perfect deal in the sense that there are many parts which would not commend themselves to us if they were standing on their own. However, in an effort to renew Confederation, each provincial leader and each native leader, aware of the needs of his or her particular constituency, has pleaded for and bargained for measures which, in the end, were acceptable to the federal government and acceptable to each of the others.

This accord represents an agglomeration of federal, Aboriginal and provincial requirements stuck together by the mortar of compromise and melded by the honest desire to save our nation. Sending it back for improvement will accomplish nothing.

Given the realities of the political environment, there is virtually no room for movement from the broad agreement described in the Consensus Report. For instance, Mr. Allaire, who wants 22 areas of exclusive jurisdiction for Quebec, would meet equally resolute politicians who would never come close to agreeing to such an arrangement. It is not about to happen. Jacques Parizeau is being intellectually dishonest to suggest to Mr. Allaire that it might happen.

In the same way, Mr. Manning, who is someone else who is showing dissatisfaction with this deal, would conclude that Quebec already has too much power and that the equality of the provinces should be held out as the central tenet of Canadian federalism. The opinions of these two men are only one example of the irreconcilability of certain positions. There are many areas where positions are irreconcilable and the only way to maintain the union is through mutual accommodation.

Accommodation is exactly what was achieved by leaders who were forced to listen to each other and respond to the pressures on their colleagues. We know what would happen if Mr. Allaire and Mr. Manning, each of whom says he wants a united Canada, were forced to sit down together to decide the fate of the Constitution between themselves. We would no longer have a united Canada. No one can possibly get everything that his or her own self-interest demands. No man is an island unto himself. Honourable senators, if our objective is a united Canada, then we must accept compromise and be prepared to accommodate each other's needs and aspirations.

I firmly believe that the compromise that was concluded in Prince Edward Island, after months of consultation and education of the public, after a lot of very good work by parliamentary committees, and after negotiations based on the good faith of Canada's leaders, is as close to meeting everyone's concerns as we can get while still maintaining an agreement. In fact, I would challenge anyone to tell me what changes could be made to this deal that would be widely accepted among the signatories. Almost all participants have had to settle for something less than they wanted in the deal; but just the same, they all accepted the deal because none amongst them was willing to settle for less than a united Canada.

Therefore the question is: Will Canada fall apart if this constitutional package is rejected? Will Canada stay together if it

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is approved? Nothing is assured. Certainly, I do not agree with those who believe that the country has the luxury of three choices: This deal, another deal, or the status quo. First, what makes anyone think that another, "better" deal could be negotiated if this one fails? "Better", of course, means a closer match to their particular ideal for a constitution. That has been the assumption in the past, but has it so far proved true? No. Many different people have been at this game for many years. Generations of politicians have tried their hand at it. It is obvious that, in the context of our present institutions, a better deal cannot be reached.

As evidence of that, I would point out that some of the most ardent opponents of the Meech Lake Accord have been the authors of this deal. Some would say, "Well, the status quo is certainly better than this Charlottetown accord, so if the accord dies we will still be better off." Perhaps, but not very likely. My experience tells me that there would be horrendous consequences stemming from that scenario. Of course, I will not go into great detail about these consequences, because that is what the media has termed "scaremongering" and my wife and my children and grandchildren would not want to have a scaremonger for a husband, father and grandfather. Nevertheless, I would hope that Canadians would give some serious thought to the probable result of a rejection of this consensus.

I do not think that it is overly dramatic or inaccurate to say that our options are two: This constitutional deal or no constitutional deal, and the very real possibility of a sovereign Quebec. Support for sovereignty in Quebec rose past 60 per cent after the defeat of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990, and it remains at historically high levels. It is conceivable that Quebecers would delay, or even defeat, a referendum on sovereignty if this package is rejected, but it seems unlikely. I, for one, would prefer not to test waters that cold.

Furthermore, let us not forget that a failure to ratify would also stand as an historic disappointment to Canada's Aboriginal peoples. This is a watershed time in their history as Canadians. Who amongst them would have the mandate to return to a negotiating table after rejection?

As for the possibility that these amendments, if passed, will only be the beginning of further change, I would offer these facts: The Constitution, especially with the changes to the amending formula, will be more difficult to change. Moreover, changing the Constitution would require a mandate from the Canadian people in order for a government to do so, and a mandate to change the Constitution will not soon be coming from the Canadian people. If or when it does come, the political environment will ensure that there is a wide-ranging mandate for change before politicians get too far into the process.

The interests of one province will not, and cannot, drive the agenda after an affirmative answer to the referendum question by the people of Canada and the implementation of these amendments. Yes, constitutional change is an ongoing historical process, but no, future amendments will not be made against the wishes of most of the partners in Confederation and most of the Canadian people.