

sive revision or, at least, be included as part of a constitutional bill of rights. I do not agree. The disparities in this nation continue to erode our nation at a time in our history when we can least afford it.

I can appreciate the Prime Minister's reference to the "collective rights" of those burdened by unequal opportunity. But these are not rights in the traditional sense; they are rights which demand substantive government action and intervention. They should stand on their own, separate from a bill of individual rights, and they require immediate implementation. Finally, there may be some feeling that embodying such a basic purpose of confederation within the constitution means nothing except yet another symbolic frill. That would be a serious misreading of the power of symbols in a nation such as ours. I leave the last word on this subject to the only surviving father of confederation, Joey Smallwood, who observed at the 1960 conference:

Even if clauses relating to regional disparity were not legally enforceable, that does not prevent them from becoming potent political forces, if need be, at some future time.

I firmly believe such action now would be a significant and positive step in strengthening our commitment to the ultimate value and worth of Canadian confederation. I hope that hon. members on all sides of the House will see fit to give approval to what I hope will be an important contribution to the further building of our Canadian confederation.

Mr. Cliff McIsaac (Battleford-Kindersley): Mr. Speaker, the motion which the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) has brought forward for discussion this afternoon gives all of us an opportunity to discuss two important subjects—the constitution itself and regional disparities in this country. On both subjects, particularly the latter, my hon. friend opposite has devoted much time, effort and energy both in the forum of the House of Commons and elsewhere. I wish to make some observations on the motion now before the House although, I regret to say, without the benefit of enough time to do as much research on this particular motion as I should have liked. I begin by considering the wording of the motion itself which has as its basis either article 46 or 47 of the Victoria conference, to which the hon. member referred. The first paragraph of the hon. member's motion reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of making a proposal to the Parliament of the United Kingdom to amend the British North America Act to include the following provisions as adopted unanimously at the Canadian Constitutional Charter Conference held at Victoria in June, 1971.

I question the words "adopted unanimously". I take exception to them and take exception to that idea as embodied in the context of the motion. The Victoria conference itself may well have agreed unanimously on the substance which forms the basis of the hon. member's motion. Certainly, I am sure that no political leader, federal or provincial, or adviser would disagree with the hon. member's idealism or his "motherhood" position, if I may use that phrase. When I refer to the issue as being one of idealism or motherhood, I do not intend to underrate it, for any politician in his right mind would adopt the hon. member's general position. Nevertheless, taken by

British North America Act

itself, the Victoria conference as a conference was a failure and the unanimity to which the motion refers was not achieved. The government of Saskatchewan did not agree to the proposed general amending formula which it is suggested resulted from the work of that particular conference.

Saskatchewan's representative at the conference was the then attorney general, Hon. D. V. Heald. The conference took place about ten days before the general election in Saskatchewan, the election which resulted in a change of government in the province. The election resulted in the Liberal government, of which Mr. Heald had been a member, going down to defeat to be replaced about ten days later by the government of Allan Blakeney. He is still the premier.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Mr. McIsaac: I suppose there was a sort of unanimity of consensus, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) himself acknowledged in a letter to do with the achievements of the Victoria conference dated October, 1971, of which I shall quote one paragraph:

The charter was subsequently approved by the government of Canada and the governments of eight provinces. The government of the province of Quebec, however, did not give its approval to the document. The government of Saskatchewan changed pursuant to the election of June 23, 1971, and thus far the present government has not taken a position on the charter.

I will not read the concluding paragraph of the Prime Minister's letter of October, 1971. Although I have not inquired recently of the provincial government of Saskatchewan, I believe the statement the Prime Minister made in his October, 1971, letter holds true today. The government of Saskatchewan did not, and does not, formally approve developments which supposedly resulted from that Victoria conference. Indeed, may I draw to the attention of hon. members the position of the then attorney general of Saskatchewan. The question of constitutional reform and the Victoria conference was dealt with in the legislature of Saskatchewan. If I recall correctly, the present premier was then the chief opposition spokesman. If I may I quote briefly from hon. D. V. Heald's presentation to that conference, he said in part:

We come to the conference in a spirit of co-operation and good will, knowing that all other participants approach the meeting with the same spirit. We believe the objectives of confederation and a new constitutional document can be achieved. We hope that our deliberations here in the next few days may contribute to the strengthening of confederation.

Concerning the amending formula, our government has always taken the position that no one province should have the right to veto constitutional changes. We now understand that several provinces are not prepared to consent to an amending formula which does not provide for those provinces having a veto. We still feel that other less rigid provisions should be considered. However, in a spirit of co-operation and with the hope of achieving a consensus we are prepared to accept the amending formula which we believe was agreed on in February.

Generally speaking, I understand that eventually there was no consensus on the part of the western provinces on their role in approving or disapproving amendments. I continue quoting: