

in it. I want to talk about one aspect of what he has said. He wants to pass those sections of Meech Lake that can, under the present constitutional law, be approved by seven provinces with 50 per cent of the population. If it was wrong to include Quebec in the Constitution without its approval, honourable senators, then it is equally wrong to leave out Manitoba and New Brunswick. That would be the effect of Mr. Vander Zalm's proposal.

I come then to the idea of an elected Senate. That is not a new idea—not my own by any means—and has been spoken of many times over the years. Part of the argument over Meech Lake—and sides are being taken—is over whether Canada should centralize or decentralize. I must say that my tendency was towards centralism, but as I grow older I think a certain amount of decentralization is essential, not just for Quebec but for the holding together of a complex federation. An elected Senate in a decentralized country would tend to give those regions a power and a say at the centre. It would result, I think, in a reduction in the power of the provinces, which would be a good thing. As it has happened in the United States, state power has been reduced and Senate power at the centre has been enhanced.

The reason this should not be dismissed is that Ontario and Quebec are ready now for an agreement because they want Meech Lake passed. They will agree now to a reasonable, elected Senate with a better division of seats. They will not agree to it once Meech Lake has passed. I am not saying that it is only Quebec that will not agree to it; I am saying that it is more likely that Ontario will not agree to it. However, one or both will not agree. The opportunity to have an elected Senate comes now.

I am talking about a Senate in which there would be 24 more seats for the West and the Maritimes, where the powers would remain the same. The senators would be elected by proportional representation and there would be a six-month veto of legislation from the House of Commons. This would give a say to the regions, because the distribution of seats, if I calculate correctly, would be some 80 seats outside Ontario and Quebec and 48 seats in Ontario and Quebec. However, it would not frustrate the concept of responsible government. It would not duplicate the House of Commons because it would be elected by proportional representation and not by "first past the post."

A Senate constructed that way would be workable and would be embraced by the people outside the central provinces. It would be invaluable in dealing with various aspects of Meech Lake to dampen down the possibility of misuse of Meech Lake. National objectives could be defined and the Senate and the regions would have a say in that definition.

● (1510)

With respect to immigration, the agreement with Quebec and the provinces would have to pass Parliament and the regions would have a say. That applies goes throughout the provisions of Meech Lake.

[Senator Everett.]

I know that Mr. Bourassa has said that there will be no Senate without Meech Lake. There is also a good chance that without an elected Senate there may not be Meech Lake. Perhaps, as you said, Senator Murray, that is too facile or too simple in that it does not deal with other complex issues. Perhaps it does not, but it is the beacon—and I think that Mr. Mazankowski is right—that will draw the West and the Atlantic provinces on side. It will create a climate in which the rest of Canada can show confidence in Quebec so that Quebec can embrace the concept of duality and we, in turn, can accept that Quebec is a distinct society. Out of that confidence prevailing in the rest of Canada will come a feeling, both inside and outside Quebec, that we have come together because we respect and like each other.

It is not quite as facile as you think. It is something for which the time has come and for which the negotiation can be successful right now. There may be other things that have to be done, but they can be done post-Meech Lake or in a parallel accord, if that were necessary. But the essence is that there should be agreement now to an elected Senate. I think it can be done and it would be effective.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Hon. L. Norbert Thériault: Honourable senators, I want to ask a question of Senator Everett, but before I do that I want to tell him that I am in agreement with almost everything that he has said. There might be some points on which I differ as to what an elected Senate might do and how it should be composed, but those are minor details. However, I want to ask him a question, because I have had the same feeling. I want to know why he has changed his mind about going to the Supreme Court of Canada.

I agree to some extent with the position taken by a lot of people—for example, constitutional experts and legislators—that the Supreme Court of Canada should be used only after legislation has been passed. However, precedents have occurred.

I want to ask him to expand more on his thoughts, because it bothers me that the Prime Minister of Canada and a number of federal ministers and spokesmen in favour of the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord come to my part of the country and other parts of the country and say that the "distinct society" clause does not mean all that much.

I read the Quebec newspapers quite a lot. I have done so all my life—in fact, I received the best part of my education from reading the French press. In those papers I read about what Mr. Bourassa and Mr. Rémillard have said. Those two very different interpretations have confused a lot of people. While I agree with Senator Everett that the Supreme Court involves a decision made by judges and that judgments may change, depending on the time, I am talking about now—the present.

For a lot my English-speaking friends in my province, this is their main concern. They are confused and do not know who to believe. Because of the position taken by Mr. Bourassa and Mr. Rémillard, does my honourable friend still think that