

The Constitution

Mr. Broadbent: We have changed Speakers, I see. I am corrected by the sage of the House, who has just pointed out to me we have changed Speakers.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate with pleasure in this very important debate, which is really a continuation of the debate which has been going on for a number of days on the future of this country. I would like to pick up on one suggestion made by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), that the approach to constitutional change be made in a non-partisan fashion as much as possible. Shortly after the referendum the Leader of the Opposition expressed sentiments of the kind expressed by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau).

● (1540)

Mr. Andre: How do you know that? We did not participate?

Mr. Broadbent: I listened to my colleagues on my right, and I would appreciate their indulgence for a few minutes. They may disagree with what I have to say, but I would have thought that it would have pleased even the member of the Conservative party most immediately to my right.

When the country's constitution is changed it should be done through consensus here in the House of Commons, outside the House, amongst the provinces, the premiers and the ordinary people of our land wherever they may live. Without criticizing the Leader of the Opposition, but simply to illustrate the point, so far, in the discussion on the proposed resolution introduced by the Government of Canada, there has been some partisan reaction. I will not pass judgment on the decision-making process which led to that reaction.

Two Conservative premiers, one from New Brunswick and one from Ontario, have indicated their support for the resolution. Then there are other Conservative premiers who, with equal good will—I am not presupposing that difference of attitude—have indicated their opposition to the government's proposal. The Premier of Saskatchewan, as members of this House well know, has not made up his mind finally on the measure. He sees certain matters which he likes and other which he does not like. The point I am making is that in some quarters there is a feeling of give and take which is appropriate when a nation experiences the kind of severe change which is inevitably involved in constitutional change.

I would like to see that kind of spirit in this debate and the pre-supposition that good will will prevail amongst those with whom we differ. I have no higher regard for the Premier of New Brunswick because he happens to be closer to my position on this issue than I have for the Premier of British Columbia. They are two different Canadians expressing their judgments, and I merely happen to be more in agreement with one than with the other. Nor am I questioning motives.

When the Leader of the Opposition says rhetorically, and he means it substantively, that we should stop being colonials and bring the constitution back to Canada before we make the changes, to a certain real extent he is game-playing.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: I would like to make my argument. What we have before us in the government resolution are topics which have been debated in Canada and upon which judgment has been passed by the people in the provinces and the House of Commons. In fact it is a Canadian decision, and the British parliament will not act unless they get a recommendation from the people of Canada. We all know that.

I suggest that there is some weakness—and I will not put it any stronger than that—in the argument that by opting for the approach put forth by the Leader of the Opposition over the approach initiated by the Government of Canada, we would somehow be more Canadian. Both involve a decision-making process, the outcome of which will be determined by Canadians. One may be more preferable than the other, but the fundamental, intellectual truth of the situation, surely, is that both decisions, whether we adopt the Conservative party approach or the approach proposed by the Government of Canada, will result in a decision made by Canadians, and no one else, in the final analysis.

There are some very serious implications in the approach proposed by the Leader of the Opposition. There are some things in the government proposal in which my party profoundly believe, such as the entrenchment of rights and the establishment of language rights for the two official languages which exist in our land. At this historical point in our history I believe that these subjects ought to be entrenched, because I fear that the opportunity may not arise again. There is the principle of equalization. This principle can be improved upon, and we will deal with that in committee. It is a principle in which I believe.

There is also the commitment, although it is very fundamental now because the government has made a commitment, that the provinces of Canada will have the right to control and manage the development of their resources. I say to the Leader of the Opposition as a member from western Canada that that is very important at this point in our history. Premier Blakeney said the very same thing at a press conference held today in Regina.

I would also say to the Leader of the Opposition that if we reject the government's approach and accept his approach—and I will come to the concerns which I have over his approach—we will lose the points I have just mentioned.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: I see that the opposition leader is shaking his head, and I will come back to that point in a minute. We will lose those things. It has been suggested by an hon. member from Newfoundland, a former cabinet minister who ought to have known better, that the proposal of the New Democratic Party on the question of resources was aimed at the province of Saskatchewan. I say to that member as a man who grew up in Ontario, nothing could be further from the truth, and I mean that.

If I thought, for example, that we could have obtained the right for Newfoundland to have control of their offshore resources, he can be sure that that would have been a principal