

The Constitution

or seven provinces acting against what I consider to be the national interest. Although I do not want to put words or thoughts into his mind, I am quite sure he has lost that fight, through no one's fault but his own. It is my belief that the leaders of all parties in this chamber come here, perhaps first and foremost to lead a national party, but through that national party to try at least to represent the entire nation. They do not come here as a mouthpiece for, or the puppet of, two, three or four provincial premiers.

I am happy to have this opportunity to tell the House and my constituents that my party leader, the hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent), under great duress and pressure from certain segments of our party in the west, stood up for national rights, the rights and best interests of Canadians, not simply the best interests of our party in one province.

In closing, I would just like to say this. If I have one disappointment with the resolution, it is that in the preamble we did not guarantee to all Canadians the right to live and work in a safe and healthy environment. This challenge still lies ahead. Those of us in this chamber who have worked hard to fight against pollution and polluters, to make our lakes and rivers clean and productive, to make the air we breathe clean and pure, the workplace safe and healthy, will continue our struggle until we win. And win we will.

As I wrote in my last message to my constituents:

Long after the political pundits and commentators have criticized and condemned the process, historians, political scientists and constitutional experts, while not agreeing on all aspects of this resolution, will at least, I feel confident say we did our best to give our fellow Canadians as a reasonable and workable Constitution under very trying and divisive circumstances.

The constitutional resolution is not a perfect document. But then, none of us in this chamber is perfect either. We have just tried to do our best. And I suggest that is all our constituents expect, no more and certainly no less.

Mr. Norman Kelly (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Supply and Services): Mr. Speaker, like everyone else who has risen before me, I am acutely aware of the significance of these deliberations. The opportunity is rarely given to Canadian politicians to participate in a constitutional debate so, unlike many members of the official opposition, I have resisted the temptation to disinter old campaign speeches and will attempt no more than to share with my colleagues on both sides a few relevant personal reflections on the resolution before us and on the nation that possesses my loyalty and commands my conviction.

This House is a legislature, but it also possesses a judicial authority which, although rarely employed, is nonetheless real. I point this out because, although I do not want to avail myself of this judicial power, I do want to evoke its spirit. For in this constitutional debate there is an idea on trial. The idea—and now I am quoting from confederation newspapers—is “the new nationality” of “one people—one in laws, one in government, one in interests”. In other words, Canada, as it was conceived and given form by our ancestors 114 years ago.

Admittedly the purity of this idea has been compromised as it has passed through the generations. We tolerate a diversity

that our founding fathers did not anticipate and probably would have abhorred, but its core, the realization of an underlying, sustaining unity to our existence and its expression in a vigorous national government, has remained substantially intact until quite recently.

Since the early 1970s, however, this core has been bludgeoned to the breaking point by the forces of cultural chauvinism and economic acquisitiveness. The instrument employed by the agents of these two forces, that is, many of the provincial premiers and most of the official opposition in this chamber, in an effort to legitimize their assault, is an alternate, diametrically opposed concept of Canada as a community of communities, a compact, a consensus, a federalist state, a partnership of two equal sovereign jurisdictions, incapable of being operated except in tandem, unable to be changed at this time save through unanimous consent and fated, through historical and geographical imperatives, to follow a decentralized destiny.

Most Canadians continue to give their allegiance to the traditional concept of the state but the vigour, and at times the flair, with which the assault on its legitimacy has been prosecuted, especially over the last few months, has confused many people and subsequently weakened their commitment to the point where the proposed constitutional improvements appear not only odious but illegal.

Well, are the administration's opponents correct? Is their version of Canada the appropriate one and ours, on this side of the House, wrong? Let me examine both ideas.

I want to go on record as saying, simply but emphatically, that the opposition's vision of Canada, this unholy trinity of compact, consensus federalism and community of communities is one of the boldest frauds ever promoted in our political history. It is as intellectually dishonest in its formulation and its propagation as it will be, if victorious, calamitous in its consequences.

These are harsh words, but they reflect my concern with a view that is advanced by its supporters as the original, and therefore the legitimate, concept of Canada. If you read the literature of the confederation period written then, or subsequently by historians, you will find nothing of substance to support their claim. None of our founding fathers believed they had created a community of communities. None of our founding fathers believed that the new state had been conceived through a compact, and none of our founding fathers believed that its future would be sustained or altered according to a consensus procedure, and because they did not believe any of these things, they did not say them.

• (1710)

They did say that the national government undeniably had to be the superior level of government with powers that were independent of and which dwarfed those of the provinces, and they crafted the British North America Act accordingly.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the opposition's idea of Canada's constitutional origins is a mythological fabrication. But despite this, despite its less than reputable origins, could this idea still