

*Constitutional Accord*

equal, effective and elected, it will be echo chamber, eternal, and ineffective. It is as dead as a dodo bird. Senate reform is as dead as the dinosaurs in Drumheller. Yet my friend waxes eloquently and quite passionately about what is going on down there and how they are becoming very partisan in their deliberations on this very fundamental document.

Quite frankly, I am not going to be partisan today because this document cuts across Party lines and there is real concern in all Parties about the Meech Lake Accord. I agree that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) brought a tremendous feeling of national reconciliation to this country after the election of 1984. We do not have the confrontation we had before. He deserves a lot of credit for getting the 10 Premiers around the table and coming up with an agreement. That is very rare. Yet we cannot be completely blind to the way some people interpret the implications of that agreement. We can all have visions of national reconciliation but we have to know if this constitutional document is going to stand the test of time; not when everyone is feeling very good and very co-operative but when there is stress and strain on the federation, as there is from time to time.

Do not bring the dragon of Pierre Trudeau out and say that is the man of yesterday. He was Prime Minister for 16 or 18 years, and in that sense he is the past, but some of the questions, if not the way he raised them, are very legitimate. I am glad Canadians are going to have a chance to assess those questions now that we have this motion to send the matter to a joint committee. I will not get into that, but I compliment my House Leader for doing that. They will have their chance if the committee gets input from the public, and hopefully the provincial legislatures will have their public input as well.

The amendment suggested by my friend from Yorkton—Melville is interesting and constructive, but the fact is we have to decide whether it is co-operative federalism or whether it is going to be fractured federalism. I am going to refer to something which is central to that question, and that is the spending power. Before I do I want to read into the record a letter I wrote to my Prime Minister on May 12. The Hon. Member for Saint-Henri—Westmount (Mr. Johnston) had spoken out, but this was before Mr. Trudeau spoke out. I talked about vision and my basic instinctive concern about what Meech Lake would do. It reads:

My Dear Prime Minister,

Notwithstanding your eloquent and sensitive speech yesterday, it is with regret and after much wrenching introspection that I am duty bound to inform you that in all conscience I cannot agree to the Meech Lake Accord. I sincerely believe that in the laudable desire to get Quebec "in", we are so fundamentally changing the future character of Canada that the "one Canada" I believe in will become too loose a Confederation with the Federal Government no longer being first among equals but merely one among equals.

I am not too disturbed about Quebec's justified claim of being a "distinct society"—but with the opting out process along with compensation, there is no doubt in my mind that in time, and soon, there will be a de facto "deux nations", let alone sovereignty-association status in that Province. Accordingly, I can appreciate why the Bourassa position has been positively received in Quebec, while unfortunately, and dangerously, in a political sense, the rest of Canada is so numb (and bored) over the constitutional process, that the

fundamental implications of nation building at Meech Lake are not receiving the proper attention they deserve.

Therefore, in my view, a one day debate in the House, while commendable, is not sufficient. However, I appreciate that the fine print of the necessary legislation will provide an opportunity for a further debate of the principles of the Accord. Nevertheless, recognizing the reality of the parliamentary and political process and the limitation of time for government business, I feel these principles should be debated now—and surely if these suggested constitutional changes are to stand the test of time, then they should now be able to withstand public and parliamentary scrutiny.

At a minimum, a parliamentary committee of both Houses should be given an opportunity to seek and hear the public's view.

This would provide a vehicle for meaningful public input on the principles of the Accord to assess whether the opting out clause might adversely affect the leadership role of the federal Government let alone the provincial veto on national institutions which surely consigns Senate reform to the perpetual backwater of a constitutional strait-jacket.

Furthermore, the institutionalizing of annual federal-provincial conferences on the Constitution and the economy, with possibly the real agreements being made (necessarily) behind closed doors, will surely render the parliamentary process somewhat redundant and hence the House of Commons, for at least the important national issues, will become a mere rubber stamp.

I have no doubt, Mr. Prime Minister, of the intensity and passion of our Francophone colleagues in all Parties with respect to their support for the Accord.

I recall when Premier Bourassa said that Quebec could not agree with the Victoria Amending Formula, he eloquently emphasized that his position was not anti-Canada but pro-Quebec. Likewise, I am not anti-Quebec but pro-Canada and Mr. Prime Minister, I hold my position with as much passion and intensity as do our Francophone colleagues.

● (1300)

The reason I read the letter was to indicate that that was my instinct at a time long before others who had more responsibility in running the country spoke out.

Why is there such concern in terms of the powers of the federal Government? I will not repeat what I said about the Senate. However, we can forget about reform in the Senate and Triple E. Anyone who thinks that there will be fundamental reform of the unanimity rule is whistling Dixie.

I should like to refer to the American experience. They are celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of their Constitution. They started with 13 little States, and they had an amending formula which required unanimity. The whole system bogged down in that more simple day. They had to reframe their Constitution and provide the amending formula which they now have where there is some flexibility.

It is ironic that we took so many years—a hundred or so—to get our Constitution back into the country where it properly should be. It had an amending formula and then, almost out of the blue—although I admit that there was a year-long negotiation behind closed doors—we are to put federal institutions into a constitutional strait-jacket from which they will never be changed.

In terms of the spending power, I should like to say that this is a very complex, complicated situation. I agree with the suggestion of the Hon. Member for Saint-Henri—Westmount that perhaps some of these matters should be considered by