

The Constitution

Mr. Lawrence: Victoria in 1971.

Mr. Regan: The hon. member opposite says "Victoria in 1971." I know about Victoria. I was there.

Mr. Lawrence: So was I.

Mr. Regan: As was the hon. member opposite. He knows that at Victoria all ten premiers agreed on the Victoria formula. The disagreement was not on the Victoria formula but on certain other additional demands made by Quebec at the last instance.

Mr. Lawrence: But there was agreement.

Mr. Regan: There was agreement.

Mr. Lawrence: Who queered it up?

Mr. Regan: When I am dealing with big game I will not be drawn aside by rabbit tracks.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lawrence: The Liberal party of Quebec queered it up, that is who.

Mr. Regan: I want to say this about the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I think he might have had an agreement since his theory of government by capitulation is the way that agreement could occur, the unanimity could be achieved. In the process, his vision of Canada as a government among equals would have been achieved and, eventually, with all of the different constitutional provisions in different provinces, our country would have been destroyed. His record with respect to fisheries, the offshore, Alberta and lotteries shows that he is prepared to give away almost anything. For those in his ranks who are supporters of the charter of rights, I assure them that he would have given in to Premier Lyon in the same way as he gave in on these other matters and there would have been no charter of rights. Yet, the right hon. gentleman condemns in his remarks our unwillingness to continue negotiating with the premiers in endless circles, like the Vienna Congress in Napoleonic times.

If the constitutional debate causes divisions in the country, those divisions are fed by the right hon. gentleman, for his present opportunities lie not in accord and congenial progress. His chances of political survival have been fed and nourished by the dissension that he causes by this resolution. He has found this issue to be a heaven-sent opportunity to differ and dispute, to pretend and protest. He knows of the stripping of federal powers, yet he is prepared to yield further fisheries to Newfoundland, offshore resources endangering our international claim to a 200-mile limit, super resource powers to Alberta and yield whatever Bennett can think of to B.C.

I want to contrast this, Mr. Speaker, with the position of the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent). On this resolution the Leader of the NDP has taken the high road. The members of the NDP have exposed themselves to criticism for going along with the government. What do they gain by

doing that? They expose themselves to criticism when they could take the easy course, the comfortable pew, of a party in opposition by opposing and being against whatever the government proposes. But I suggest that the difference is that the Leader of the New Democratic Party, with the proper recognition of principle and an understanding of the importance of strong central government, discharges his responsibilities in a way that the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition is not doing.

There is one other statement made by the Leader of the Opposition with which I would like to deal. He says, erroneously, that we are destroying the tradition of equality of the provinces. I do not know where he has found the historic exercise of any such principle. It is true that all provinces equally share the same legislative authority. But provinces have never participated equally in the formal institutions of the Government of Canada. They have not been equal in their representation in the House of Commons, nor in the Senate which is, supposedly, the voice of provincial interests. Actually, the Senate is roughly divided four ways, based upon the regions of the country and not the provinces. The provinces are not represented equally in the Supreme Court. They are not represented equally in the cabinet.

Indeed, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition, when he was prime minister, did not have Manitoba, Nova Scotia or New Brunswick represented in his inner cabinet. Yet he now speaks in glowing terms of the member from Manitoba who was in his cabinet but was not included in his inner cabinet. Provinces have never been treated equally. I think you could not find a finer example of that.

We should be determined to accord fair and equitable treatment to all provinces, but at the same time let us not distort history and pretend that the premise has been different than it has. Indeed, it is not through our resolution or our formula that different classes of province would be created, as the hon. gentleman suggests. It is by his Vancouver formula that different classes of provinces would be created, some with entrenched rights, some without and some with different constitutional provisions from others.

The Leader of the Opposition reserves his most violent opposition for the proposed use of a referendum, region by region, to break an ongoing deadlock between the provinces and the federal government. I find this very difficult to understand because the way to break a deadlock, until now, has been recourse to the British parliament. After patriation that method will be gone forever. What we propose is somewhat similar to what Australia has. It has not destroyed federalism in that country; rather, their people have shown a judicious ability to balance federal and provincial arguments in the outcome of referenda. I fear his repugnance of resort to the people to break a deadlock indicates that he does not trust the people. Perhaps after last year I can understand why.

The same public elects two levels of government. If those two levels cannot agree, is it not logical to resolve the dispute by going back to those same electors from whom the legitimacy of both governments spring? The Leader of the Opposition says that the aftermath of this resolution will see us looking at