

*The Address—Mr. Richardson*

It is quite wonderful to be a new Member. I have no callous cynicisms and fondly hope that they may never develop. I listened yesterday to the Speech from the Throne with growing excitement. The people of Calgary Southeast did not send me here for a visit. They sent me down here to listen for them, to hear for them, to report to them and, premised in large measure on what I hear, to speak for them.

I am well aware that Edmond Burke insisted that Parliament is not a Congress of ambassadors from different and hostile regions, which interests each must maintain. It is early in the day for me to challenge that great man. But there is a world of difference between our giant federation with its widely ranging interests and viewpoints and the unitary Britain of Burke's day. We are not, I hope, hostile regions. However, we are sufficiently different in our aspirations, opportunities, geography and environment that it is a constant and demanding task to educate our fellow Canadians in the valid expectations of our own region or province and of others.

As historian David Bercuson explains:

Western Canada was not settled through the steady movement of eastern Canadians pushing westward against an expanding frontier of settlement. It was peopled instead mostly by immigrants who had no knowledge of or connection with central or Atlantic Canada. It was natural therefore that the development of ideas, values and traditions in western Canada would not strictly follow the ideas, values and traditions that had already developed in central and Atlantic Canada. The West was to be different because its people were different.

The western Canadian character was moulded by experience acting on tradition. Immigrants brought the culture, values, language and religion of their native lands with them in their confrontation with western Canada's society and environment. Some were eager to embrace the ways of their adopted countries. Others clung tenaciously to their old traditions. All faced the hardships and trials of settlement in a new and harsh land far from home. The experience of settlement and expansion, of putting down roots and building farms and ranches, cities and towns, stores and factories, created a blend of individualism and co-operation among westerners. There was a Canadianism with a truly western flavour. Homesteaders did not just believe in rugged individualism, they lived it.

In this way westerners developed a sense of community. They were separated from central and eastern Canada by distance and attitude. Their economy was based on the extraction of raw, unfinished products that were shipped elsewhere for processing. Policies which affected the daily lives of westerners were often made by a distant Government, controlled by those with little knowledge of or interest in the special problems and circumstances of westerners. Westerners, therefore, developed an identity based on individualism and a need for co-operation, on the very experience of living on prairie farms or in British Columbia mining towns. They were different because they felt themselves to be different.

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This kind of attitude has resulted in our people having a very strong desire to influence their own destiny. We westerners have made decisions since we first came into this country. Westerners, to a considerable extent, have had an independent sense and a strong feeling that we do not want to be told to participate. We have been part of the process, we are part of the process and we have every desire to remain a part of the process.

You will never really understand the West unless you understand the populism, the very real and existing populism of the western Canadians. This populism roots very deeply in the early farmers organizations and the co-operative activities that were the source of joint effort, the source of development and the source of growth in the undeveloped communities of the early settlement years.

The drive for a reformed Senate emanating from the West can be understood in the context of western populism. A reformed Senate, an elected Senate, would address serious regional grievances in all parts of this country, but to westerners it is particularly appealing as another vehicle in which our voices can be heard. It is a great credit that this Government is the first federal Government to put Senate reform at the top of constitutional discussions. It is yet another example of the Prime Minister's responsiveness to the unique needs and desires of our region.

We in this House are on the cutting edge of political decisions, but that is all. Each of us, in every corner of this House, and those of us from the West, have behind us the firm strong record of a decisive people who are ready to sit with us and discuss one on one the manner in which this nation should be run.