

*The Constitution*

If we are to have any hope of changing our inequitable and flawed approach to true regional equality, Members of Parliament from Ontario and Quebec must be willing to abandon party lines and vote according to their consciences with a generosity of outlook which will accept the concept of each Canadian province as an equal in terms of status when it comes to voting on those issues affecting our nation's destiny in amending our Constitution. To give any province a veto will never work. Even in the United Nations there are not two classes of member states when it comes to voting in the General Assembly. And surely in Canada we do not want to create the equivalent of a Security Council to which only two provinces can belong.

Speaking about regional interests, I have been very disappointed in the behaviour of members of the Senate so far, with a few notable exceptions, some of whom have transcended party doctrines. Most hon. senators have done very little to stand up for our regions. This body was designed to protect the provinces and to be the institution of sober second thought, but so far, because of a discipline imposed by the government, the Senate is proceeding in lock-step with the House of Commons, not even waiting until matters are concluded by elected members.

Some senators from other parts of the country, but particularly, from my point of view, from the Atlantic region, have spoken out; and I want to emphasize again how it was that our former advantageous trading position and independence of spirit was the first casualty of confederation. Our offshore resources are a recent casualty of so-called renewed federalism. Even the transportation imperatives which were once a part of the British North America Act have been allowed to fade away.

Let me speak specifically about the former Section 145 of the British North America Act dealing with the inter-colonial railway, which was a very vital ingredient of confederation. That section, which provided an obligation to maintain a satisfactory railway system in the eastern part of our country, has now been deleted. I would like to put this section on the record but time does not permit. The present policy of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) is to downgrade, close and bypass the rail system in eastern Canada and to ship vast amounts of goods and services directly by water from Quebec to Newfoundland.

● (1610)

Would Nova Scotia or Newfoundland join confederation today? The answer is not all that clear; but changing the rules in the middle of the game is not an honourable thing to do, unless one has at least the consent of the majority of the players. This is what the federal government is doing.

I suppose it is fair to say that where one stands on an issue depends upon where one sits. I stand for fair treatment for my region. In so doing, I know it means fair treatment for the west and that ultimately it will be for the good of the country. If the diverse parts of the country which have the drive and the resources are not kept subservient by the votes and the money

in the centre of the country, ultimately we will all be better off.

When John Diefenbaker talked about one Canada, he did not mean one Canada with an Orwellian creed—that all provinces are equal but some provinces are more equal than others. All of us in the chamber at various times have talked with great pride about our country: its magnificence, its size, its diversity, the warmth and variety of its societies, and the talents of the people enclosed within its borders. Often we speak about its wonderful potential. Often we use the rhetoric of a great Liberal prime minister who made the celebrated prediction that the twentieth century belongs to Canada. But potential can be lost. Athletes, poets and even countries have had their potentials set back if they lack proper training, proper opportunities and, in the case of a country, proper leadership. Some countries have had their futures affected by war and depression, some by egocentric or careless leaders.

I think of Argentina which in the early part of this century had the same potential as Canada. Indeed today it is making progress because of the competitive excellence of its people in many fields of endeavour. I mention Argentina as an example because it is a large, beautiful country; a confederation with 22 provinces and a federal district. It is a country much like ours, with about the same population and many other traits in common, including the production of vast amounts of wheat and the raising of cattle. They have their pampas; we have our prairies. We claim interest in the Arctic; they claim interest in the Antarctic. Generally they are of European stock. They are still having a great deal of trouble with inflation, but I have been told by prominent Argentinians that one of the main reasons for their setback was that their politicians let them down. I hate to see our country fractured and failing to realize its potential because our politicians let down Canada. I do not want to have to say in the future or to hear anyone else say, for example: "What Juan Peron did to Argentina, Pierre Trudeau did to Canada".

My main concern is that we not subordinate parts of our country, not destroy the feeling of equality between the partners of confederation. If in its so-called wisdom the federal government wants to codify more rights, or wants to bring in other changes to see how they operate, then with some difficulty in the future, if these measures are not satisfactory, they can be changed. But if we give the centre of our country a different and superior status to the rest, how will we ever change it. It will be very difficult and may destroy us one way or another, because although we are proud Canadians, we have a strong attachment and loyalty to our provinces.

Surely Ontario and Quebec are confident enough and secure enough, in the leading role they play by virtue of their present size, economic strength and geographic location, that they would not want to set their status in stone, to formalize by statute this condition in such a way that other provinces will always be subject to their veto. There will be, to use again United Nations phraseology, a sort of security council built into our country.