

The Constitution

Act completely or substitute something which is entirely different. Surely, the partners; the provinces, must be consulted.

I suggest that it is morally improper for the federal government to decide, on its own, to patriate the British North America Act, without the substantial agreement of the provinces. The federal government hopes to pass this with a majority in the House and with a majority in the Senate. Britain will then be asked to approve a piece of legislation, when it comes back to Canada, which cannot be changed by Parliament using the same method. Other legislation passed by the House and the Senate can be amended or repealed by a civil majority.

There is no moral justification or principle for what the Liberal Party suggests. I am not surprised by the lack of moral justification for what they are doing, but I suggest to them that the end does not justify the means. By its actions, the Liberal Party is guaranteeing bitterness and acrimony across Canada.

I also suggest that it is politically improper for the federal government to patriate the British North America Act on its own. The Liberal Party has no political mandate on its own. A political party achieves a mandate as the result of campaigning on a platform, or making a promise and then being elected to office. Once elected, that party has a political mandate for the people to do what it promised to do.

The Liberal Party was elected to office on the promise that it would not raise the price of energy. One year and eight price increases later, the price of gas has gone up 28 per cent, and the price of home heating oil has gone up 36 per cent. The Liberal Party forgot about the promise the day of the election, if, indeed, it ever believed it.

How does that promise, followed by that performance, translate into a mandate to completely change the British North America Act? The Liberal Party proposes to change the very foundation upon which this country has grown and prospered for 114 years. Such a proposal demands more than a mere five-vote majority in the House of Commons. It demands a substantial agreement of the elected representatives of Canada, federally and provincially. It demands a consensus throughout Canada, from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Victoria, B.C.; from Windsor, Ontario to the Arctic Circle.

The Liberal Party is proceeding with its rock-hard, "My mind is made up, don't change my mind with facts" majority of 74 seats from Quebec, joined by what might best be called "political groupies" from Ontario and the Atlantic provinces; and two lonely members from Manitoba, representing the west. Stick around, they are dropping like flies.

● (2010)

How does it pretend to represent Canada? In fact, public opinion is running 64 per cent against what the Liberal Party proposes for Canada. This brings me to the subject of the Prime Minister's (Mr. Trudeau) actions with reference to this bill.

The Prime Minister berated the provincial premiers for their failure to deal with the patriation of the Constitution and the bargaining which went on. Who will forget his manufactured indignation when he suggested with disgust that the provincial premiers are bargaining fish for rights? Since he made that statement, he has made a few bargains of his own. He bargained for Saskatchewan's support by allowing his partner, the Leader of the NDP, to introduce an amendment respecting natural resources.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): The little red rump.

Mr. Lewis: Unfortunately, he did not cut too good a deal because the Premier of Saskatchewan has rejected this legislation. He bargained for Senate support by allowing an amendment giving this appointed body veto power when he was faced with Senate revolt. I want to be here when the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) stands on principle and votes for that. But none of his bargaining looked as bad as the treatment of his Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan). Speaking for the government on a Friday, the Solicitor General gave a commitment to support an amendment enshrining property rights in the charter of rights and freedoms. The following Monday, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) reneged on that promise. As a result, the reputation of the Solicitor General was sullied and shattered and members on all sides were saddened to see what happened to this minister of the Crown.

On various occasions it has been suggested that the Liberal Party was fulfilling a campaign promise made to the province of Quebec during the referendum campaign by bringing forward this bill. If this legislation was supposed to fulfil that promise, it is indeed strange that the Parti Québécois, the Union Nationale and the Quebec Liberal Party are all opposed to what the federal Liberal Party are doing.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): So are the polls.

Mr. Lewis: I understand the polls today reflect that same sentiment in the province of Quebec.

Be that as it may, I would point out that this House made no commitment during the referendum campaign. During the time of the referendum, this House and the country were treated to the spectacle of Liberal cabinet ministers from Quebec reciting the litany of things they were doing for that province, and the governing of Canada ground to a halt.

The Liberal party has a duty to all the provinces, not just one. It has a duty to all of the people of this country, not just the people of one province. It has a duty to create a positive attitude in this country, but its actions have poisoned provincial relationships. I implore the government to think of the future of this country and not of the magnificent obsession of one man. I implore the government to seek the approval of the majority of the provinces before it proceeds.

Patriation of the British North America Act has been stalled because no agreement has been reached at first ministers' conferences as to an amending formula. I say to you, Mr.