

The Constitution

constituent assembly composed of representatives of all Canadians—elected politicians, ethnic groups, women, men, labour, business, academics and others—could consider those statements of problems and proposed solutions and, after some considerable period of time and examination, make recommendations to the partners in our federation. With the moral authority of such a body I think we could end up with a good Constitution.

When I have those thoughts in my head, I run them against my personal experience in this Parliament in dealing with the Constitution of Canada. I read a memo which advised the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the government opposite that it seemed unlikely that the partners in confederation could agree to the federal perspective or buy totally what the Prime Minister wanted them to, and in that event it was important to turn the September first ministers' conference into a public relations platform designed to convince the Canadian people that it was the provinces which were to blame and not the federal government.

The next piece of advice in that memo of 59 pages was that the federal government should then move quickly to ram its ideas through, and the federal government was warned that if it took too long, the opposition would grow. I refer to that as the strategy of speed and secrecy. Step one involved closure, the denial of free speech in this House of Commons on the Constitution of Canada after 24 hours of debate. After one full day of debate, closure was invoked. That fits the strategy of speed and secrecy.

Step two was to move the resolution to the committee. In the committee there were 15 Liberals, two New Democrats, and eight Conservatives. The memo advised that this step be taken because it would make it easier to control the committee. We think that committees are masters of their own destinies and that majority rules, but when there are 15 votes for the government and ten for the opposition, we can see that that control is evident. Was that control put to use? I suggest it was.

We started out with a 30-day time limit, no television, no broadcasting, and long hours. People became tired. We fought, and some of those things were amended slightly. However, hidden in the background was the exercise of control over the choice of witnesses and the length of time they had to appear before the committee. There was the warning that closure was everywhere we turned. As one member of this House who sat there for a long, long time, I have no sense of pride. I carry something more akin to a sense of shame that a free and democratic institution like the Parliament of Canada forced me to participate in something which had many elements of a charade rather than a true inquiry.

● (1750)

I sat there and I heard the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) and others in our party move an amendment, and before it was out of their mouths, the Minister of Justice said that the government would or would not vote for it. Before the arguments were heard, before the wisdom of that amendment

was apparent, the minister said the government would or would not vote for it, and the 15 members did what the Minister of Justice told them to do.

An hon. Member: Shame!

Mr. Hawkes: Then they had the gall to come to the House and say this was a resolution sponsored by the Parliament of Canada. It is not; it is a government initiative supported by government members and by some of their marriage partners from the NDP.

In early October I took great pride in the fact that the leader of this party said on national television that this was a bad piece of legislation. That was on Thursday night. The Leader of the NDP (Mr. Broadbent) and the Prime Minister said it was good. But what are the facts, Mr. Speaker?

We have a resolution before us in the House today. The resolution we saw in early October had 59 clauses. The resolution we now have before us has 68 amendments: 67 mandated by the committee and one moved since then which nobody seems to have noticed. What does an amendment mean? When the government agrees to it, it means the government acknowledged the mistake. There were 67 mistakes which the government was willing to acknowledge in a bill which had 59 clauses. Have there ever been in the history of this Parliament 67 or 68 amendments to a 59 clause bill? It was the worst piece of legislation that this Parliament has ever considered, and the leader of our party told Canadians that.

I heard the Leader of the NDP stand up in the House the other day and say that this is the best we can hope to have. But the leader of that party and his caucus proposed 43 amendments to the resolution. They saw 43 mistakes in the bill. Two amendments were accepted and 41 were not—there are still 41 amendments which he identified, and now they call it the best that this country can do. I am ashamed of them.

If we looked around us, we would also find that in the process of federal-provincial consultation there was a 12-item agenda and agreement was reached in large part on such items as communications, offshore resources, fisheries, and family law. They agreed on a different amending formula, they agreed on something different on resource ownership, different from what we find in this resolution. Why is that? Why do the NDP and hon. members opposite sit here so willingly intending to vote for this resolution, when in fact they know that such a large part of what is needed in the way of constitutional revision, such a large part of what was agreed to, does not appear in this resolution? What does appear is a number of things on which there was never agreement or discussion.

I see that my time is running out, Mr. Speaker. When I began my comments, I was wondering whether I would be able to speak for 40 minutes. I see now that I have dealt with only one third of the items I had prepared for my speech today.

An hon. Member: Carry on.

Mr. Hawkes: I suppose that all I can really do in conclusion is to express, as clearly and as succinctly as I can, my belief