

present Prime Minister been there, his answer would obviously have been to reactivate Lord Durham.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald: No, the political leaders of that day turned instead to their colleagues in other jurisdictions, to the working politicians of the time—Macdonald, Brown, Cartier, Galt, Langevin, Tilley, Tupper—and even though it took them three years of study, scrapping, reconciliation, and accommodation, they came up with a plan for a united Canada. They did not pretend to have the last word on Confederation. They were not searching for an ultimate truth, either to find one or to impose one.

● (2020)

The resolution before us and the attitude of the government for nine years suggest that language and language policy are the ultimate truth, that the country is defined by its languages, that bilingualism is the soul of Canada. This displays a very limited, a very narrow concept of Canada. Canada is much more than that. We know, Mr. Speaker, that economic disparities between English and French speaking groups, or between different regions of the country, exacerbate the problems of national unity every day they remain unresolved. But there is another dimension to the problem of national unity which has been largely ignored, and that is the political dimension. I do not mean by that the calling of an early election to capitalize on a crisis and thereby heighten the cynicism which abounds in the country regarding our political institutions. No, Mr. Speaker; when I refer to the neglect of the political dimension of this crisis I am referring to a long overdue analysis of our political system, our federal system, to see how it has to be changed to meet the demands of a greatly changed society from that of 110 years ago.

Over a century of experience in the art of federalism has provided Canadians with a workable political structure which is the envy of many countries throughout the world, given our complexities and diversities. But that does not mean that it does not require a major overhaul from time to time.

The agenda, the mandate, for a parliamentary committee looking into the causes of disunity in this country could cover a number of problems not presently being dealt with in any other forum in this House. It could monitor what the government is doing at the federal-provincial level and suggest ways to avoid the absurdity of one branch of government spending months working out complex new fiscal arrangements with the provinces, in complete isolation from another branch of government working on a language policy which, if implemented, would necessarily involve tremendous additional federal funding.

A special committee dealing with the problems of national unity might be able to bring some order out of this chaos. When lapses of that nature occur, is it any wonder the central government is regarded with distrust and hostility as the "alien they" by individuals, groups, and provincial governments across the country?

National Unity

Well, how to overcome this lack of legitimacy, how to bring a new harmony to the federal system, how to make our national institutions reflect the regional nature of the country which has forced the provinces to be the primary spokesmen of regional needs? These questions would be high on the list of priorities for a parliamentary committee to examine when considering the faltering political dimension of our federal system.

Another agenda item for this Commons committee could be the consideration of a regional base for certain of our national institutions. Provincial nominees on such major bodies as the Senate and the Supreme Court of Canada would be an obvious starting place. In addition the committee could examine the composition of the ever-growing number of regulatory, administrative, and quasi-judicial agencies which exercise such broad powers.

As Professor John Meisel of Queen's University puts it in a forthcoming paper:

Some of these agencies like the CRTC and the CTC are within federal jurisdiction but deal with matters vital to provincial development; others like the National Energy Board operate in areas where the provinces share constitutional responsibility. In both cases there are good reasons for shaping the structure and membership so as to provide closer ties to provincial governments.

I am gravely disturbed when I see major recommendations being made by a three man federally appointed board, such as the National Energy Board, in a field in which the provinces have unquestioned rights, and yet the provinces must come before board hearings in the manner of suppliants, with exactly the same status accorded to any individual citizen in this country. Is it any wonder we do not have a national energy policy when the main national agency for formulating that policy does not reflect the true political dimensions of the federal system? The same can be said regarding the lack of a national transportation policy, a national communications policy, a national regional development policy, etc.

But if regional or provincial representation were included in national institutions, Professor Meisel considers that "federal institutions would thus act as brokers of distinct regional and ethnic interests, and the decisions of such bodies, while applicable nationally, would result from the reconciliation of various provincial interests. Federal policies would more likely respond to regional interests, and also the regional interests represented in Ottawa would begin to perceive the national dimensions to their concerns."

The need to restructure the political—and by that I mean the federal—dimension of these bodies would be an important agenda item for a parliamentary committee seeking to eradicate some of the causes of friction in our federal system. Such a committee, if bold enough, might even examine the failure of this Chamber and of political parties to provide adequate national representation. On many occasions I have said that I believe the lack of strength of the Conservative party in Quebec over a long period of time, and the lack of Liberal representation on the prairies, have aggravated the threat to national unity.