

The Constitution

to know Canada, and that is why I love Canada and the people of all ethnic backgrounds who make up this great country. That is why we should not allow provincial barriers in any part of this country.

When I travel back to my constituency at the weekends and return to Ottawa on Monday, hardly a week goes by without my meeting on the plane five or six young Prince Edward Islanders who are on their way to Calgary or Toronto seeking jobs, a plane ticket in their pocket and a few dollars. That is quite an experience. I can relate to it because I went through that myself 26 years ago. The only thing different was that I did not have the money for the plane ticket—I used my thumb to get me across this great country. I do not believe we in this Parliament can deny young people from all corners of this great country that privilege and that opportunity if they so desire.

I believe the third main objective of this resolution is to entrench the principle of equalization into the constitution. It is an absolute necessity for the very survival of my province, the province of Prince Edward Island. I was looking over the speech made yesterday by the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. McMillan) and he quite correctly pointed out what the federal government means to Prince Edward Island. He pointed out that of the \$505 million expenditures in 1978 \$426 million was in the form of transfer payments or other payments from Ottawa. That is why it is very essential to my province that equalization be written into the new constitution.

When the Fathers of Confederation convened in Charlottetown in 1864, Prince Edward Island was in a very favourable economic position—a “have” area, if you will. I am quite sad to say that since confederation the fair isle of Prince Edward Island has eroded, not only has the sea eroded our beaches but there has also been economic erosion over the last 113 years. Without guaranteed equalization payments, a sharing of the almost limitless wealth of this great country, Prince Edward Island, along with other provinces, would find itself in very difficult circumstances.

A feeling of concern and willingness to share is nothing new to Canadians. The desire to share and help others less well blessed than ourselves has always been an ingredient to be admired in the over-all character of Canadians. But there are many millions of people in underdeveloped countries around the world who would readily admit that their lot is a better one because of Canada's willingness to share. It is that willingness to share in this country which draws us closer together as Canadians.

I believe it is absolutely essential to settle the question of the amending formula. The provinces and the federal government will be involved in studying all constitutional revisions or changes which will affect all Canadians. But the prospect of gaining unanimity on an amending formula is very dim. This being the case, and I believe that hon. members would agree, in order for my province of Prince Edward Island to be afforded meaningful input, I will be suggesting an amendment to section 42 to the committee. I hope that the Premier of Prince Edward Island will join forces with me in submitting

that amendment and, indeed, that the two hon. members for the ridings of Malpeque (Mr. Gass) and Hillsborough in P.E.I. will join with us.

● (1550)

I believe that it is necessary to have an amendment because the population of the Atlantic provinces as of July, 1980, if my figures are correct, was 2,265,600 people. Prince Edward Island comprises only 124,000 of this total, or 5.4 per cent of the population of the Atlantic region. Therefore it would be impossible for Prince Edward Island in concert with any other singular province of the Atlantic region to be representative of 50 per cent of the population of that region.

My suggested amendment would be that at least two of the Atlantic provinces be in agreement with no reference made to specific percentages of the population of the Atlantic region. The hon. member for Hillsborough brought up this point yesterday, but I was surprised that he did not suggest an alternative, and I am very surprised that the Premier of Prince Edward Island, Mr. MacLean, whom I admire and who sat in these chambers for many years, did not approach the situation in a little different light.

The hon. member for Hillsborough mentioned that this government was taking the matter on in a partisan fashion. I do not believe that. He also went on to say that he believed that this government could learn a lesson from history, in particular from the Fathers of Confederation who, over a century ago, set aside their often bitter partisanship for a greater cause which was the union of the British North American colonies. He went on to say that at the Charlottetown conference the P.E.I. delegation was comprised of three government members and two opposition members. I would suggest to the premier of the province that rather than take the matter to the courts, perhaps he could learn that same lesson from history. Perhaps, instead of going back to his ten colleagues and making the decision that they would go to the courts, the premier could do something which is more representative of the people.

If the premier were interested in what the hon. member for Hillsborough suggested should be our interest, then he should have used another alternative. The premier could have called the House of Assembly in Prince Edward Island into session to obtain the views of the opposition. Or, indeed, in a province as small as Prince Edward Island, he could have called an election—and I think that it would have been welcomed—to let the people decide. But he has not done that. The premier has not even called a bye-election in my old riding of Second Prince. Perhaps this would have given him an indication as to how the people of Prince Edward Island feel about this amendment to the constitution.

These are a number of points which I wanted to bring up because I believe that there are all kinds of room to make specific points in this debate. I do not believe that this government or, indeed, this Parliament, is out to shaft any one area or province of this country. I believe that every one of us sitting here today loves our country too much to do such a thing.