

The Constitution

Senate. There is a commitment from the Government that this would be done if the resolution becomes part of our Constitution.

I would like to tell the House of the evolution of our democratic institutions to give the background for the reason we are moving this resolution. In doing that, it is necessary to review our gradual but continuing process from the arbitrary rule of French or British colonial Governors with their appointed Councils to full self-government through democratic and responsible institutions.

As Hon. Members know, our form of Government has evolved dramatically since its early days. Like other democratic countries which follow the British system, we are continuously adapting our political institutions to changing values and different circumstances, all of which reflects the unending quest to try to put into practice the ideals of democracy.

The first critical step toward these ideals was taken 227 years ago in 1758 when the first representative assembly was convened in Nova Scotia. For the first time in any part of what is now known as Canada, the British Governor and his Council could no longer impose taxes without the consent of an assembly which represented the people. That began in Nova Scotia in 1758.

● (1220)

It was an important development which began to move toward control by the people over their Government. In the following decades, representative assemblies were established in other British North American colonies: Prince Edward Island in 1773; New Brunswick in 1784; Upper and Lower Canada in 1791—of course, Upper and Lower Canada followed behind the Atlantic Provinces—and Newfoundland in 1832, which followed behind Upper and Lower Canada. Newfoundland has been following behind ever since.

Shortly thereafter, leaders such as Joseph Howe in Nova Scotia, Louis Joseph Papineau in Lower Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie in Upper Canada, and Amor de Cosmos in British Columbia began to campaign, not only to control the imposition of new taxes, but they also demanded that the executive be responsible to the elected assembly for government policies and how the taxes were spent.

That led to the next crucial step in the evolution of our political institutions—responsible government. Mr. Speaker, as you are a well-known constitutional scholar in your own right, you will know that, again, Nova Scotia led the way. In January, 1848, the Nova Scotia Assembly adopted a motion of non-confidence. The Executive Council, which was led by James Johnston, resigned and J. B. Uniacke was asked to form a Government. Following the Nova Scotia example, that historic change spread throughout British North America. It occurred later that year in New Brunswick and in the Province of Canada. It occurred in Prince Edward Island three years later, and in 1855 in Newfoundland. Newfoundland, which is usually a half hour ahead, was a number of years behind in that case.

Thus, the principle of responsible self-government in domestic affairs was firmly rooted in the unwritten part of the Constitution, which was important even before Confederation. The rule was established that the Government which lost the confidence of the elected House would have to resign or seek a new mandate. There is an example of that now in the Province of Ontario. Apparently, that Government may have lost the confidence of the elected House. The Liberal Party and the NDP, heart-to-heart, cheek-to-cheek, jowl-to-jowl and toe-to-toe, as they usually are, are joining together in an attempt to eject the Government which is governing at Queens Park. We will know in the next two or three weeks whether they will be successful.

That is the system. If the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party wish to coalesce, to act covertly, overtly, or in any other way, that is their responsibility and the electorate will deal with them later.

The Ministry collectively became responsible to the elected representatives of the people for government policy. For example, the Cabinet is responsible to the elected representatives for government policy, not to the Senate. The Cabinet is not responsible to the Senate. Each Minister with a portfolio became accountable to the House for the administration of his or her Department. As a result of those developments, responsible government was the guiding principle for the Fathers of Confederation when they met in Charlottetown, Quebec City and London to consider what form the union should take.

In the years that followed, as Canada grew eastward, westward and northward—eastward, of course, to take in Newfoundland—representative and responsible government was established in other provinces. In the 1860s, British Columbia did not have an elected assembly. That province's struggle for responsible government coincided with the campaign to join Confederation. In 1871, B.C. became a province. Later that year, in accordance with the terms of the union, responsible government was instituted in British Columbia. I will not say any more about responsible government in British Columbia, as that might be debated.

Manitoba was created in 1870 with an elected assembly and a responsible government.

Mr. Murphy: He is on camera now.

Mr. Crosbie: Who is on camera? The hon. chatterer opposite is certainly not on camera. It would be very damaging for his Party if he were. If that simpering visage went across the country, I am sure it would badly damage his Party's standing in the polls, which is already very low.

A Territorial legislature was established in the prairie region in the late 19th century. Alberta and Saskatchewan were granted responsible government when they became provinces in 1905. The Yukon and the Northwest Territories have had fully-elected Councils since 1908 and 1966 respectively. Although the form of responsible government is not yet perfect in that part of the country, the political development is moving in that direction.