

The Constitution

Canada in those days—to get employment and to raise their families or, to what we called the Boston states—the New England states—where there are today hundreds of thousands of native born Newfoundlanders—how free are you if that is the price of freedom? We did not forfeit any freedom in 1949. Let there be no mistake about that. We expanded it and we gave it meaning. We did not abandon our little independent proud fiefdom—our little relic of an almost feudal system. We did not abandon that little powerless, economically impotent fiefdom in 1949 so that we could become one of ten little economically weak fiefdoms in 1980. Because, Mr. Speaker, if you listened carefully to what some of the premiers were saying, and I refer particularly to Premiers Bennett, Loughheed, Lévesque, and Peckford, it is clear that their concept of this country can only be described in terms of a feudal system, in terms of an economically weak fiefdom—or ten fiefdoms—at the mercy all the time of the international community.

On this note I conclude. We, in Newfoundland and Labrador, know where we came from as a people. We were a separate country from 1855 until 1949. We know where we came from and we are very proud of it, but please do not ask us to go back.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I simply ask for the unanimous consent of the House—I think the speaker's time is used up—to ask the hon. member one short question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Do I see that the hon. member for Burin-St. George's (Mr. Simmons) is prepared to accept a question, and do I have the consent of the House to proceed with one question? Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what the hon. member had to say. When talking about the premiers, the hon. member for Burin-St. George's said, and I quote—I believe accurately that he did not want to be subjected to “the whim of the majority of the day”. I accept that. I think that is a very real danger. If the hon. member is afraid of that, why would he then support section 42 of this particular provision which enables the federal government to use exactly the same tactic?

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. He brings up an extremely important point. First of all, I am glad to hear that he does agree with me on my concern about the whim of the moment. Section 42, if he would read it carefully, as I am sure he has, points out that not only will there be a simple 51 per cent majority across the nation, but that there will be a 51 per cent majority in each of the defined regions, so that there is there the added protection which these regional majorities would afford. Also, if the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock-North Delta (Mr. Friesen)—I see he shakes his head on that, but I tell him that I have looked at it in the past hour or two because that very section was the subject of some other discussion I had earlier today. I

ask him to read that, and if I have not reflected an accurate intent of that I would be prepared to discuss it with him further, either inside or outside the House.

● (1600)

The point I make is that section 42 does require that there be the majority of the several regions of the country defined in that section. Also, of course, notwithstanding what I have said about whims, indeed in contrast to what I said about whims, it is one thing for a legislature in which a premier commands a majority to, this week or this month, react very quickly to a popular concern in the country. It is quite another thing to invoke section 42 after you have gone over a period of months, and I submit years in some cases, through another process of consultation with the provinces and debate in this particular Parliament. In that context, I submit to my friend that section 42 becomes a method of sober second thought or third thought after the other processes have been gone through.

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I have been in this House for the better part of 20 years. During that period of time I have had the privilege of sitting here with six different prime ministers and six different leaders of Her Majesty's loyal opposition. It is a well-known and accepted convention in this House that the members of this place who occupy these particular offices are accorded a respect and a dignity in keeping with those offices. Because we are a civilized Parliament, and because of that convention, in all the years I have been here I have never witnessed such an attack on one of the members of this House who occupies the distinguished position of Leader of the Opposition and former prime minister—I have never witnessed such a scurrilous personal vilification of an officer of this House in all the years I have been here, and I am ashamed that it should come from a member of Parliament from my province.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: Having sat through the first chapter of the hon. member's speech last night, I intended to treat it with the silent contempt that it so justly deserved. I was somewhat encouraged today to note that he was able to rise to a somewhat higher plane, although at times he did not succeed in doing that. However, I cannot ignore it. I can only deal with it in this way.

The hon. member will not serve himself well by indulging in that kind of personal vilification and scurrilous attack on any member of this House, particularly on a former prime minister and a man who is leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition (Mr. Clark).

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: I suggest to my hon. friend that if he aspires to be anything higher than a parliamentary secretary, he better clean up his act. Indeed, I am sure hon. members will understand when I say to them that there was a perceptive rise in the level of debate in the legislature of Newfoundland when