

The Constitution

have faith in Canada. I have faith in the capacity of Canadians to work out those details.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: What is more, I believe Canadians should be given the chance. Why leave the decisions to the British? We are an independent, sovereign country. I want us to act like Canadians, not like colonials. This provision would allow us to do that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Various proposals were suggested in the continuing committee's report, and it seems clear that final agreement was clearly within reach with no fundamental issue of principle threatening to polarize or divide opinion. In our view those final stages of negotiation could be completed in short order. No participant in the September conference has suggested otherwise. Perhaps the Minister of Justice will today, but it will be the first time because he has not suggested otherwise before, nor have the representatives of the premiers.

We do know that the Prime Minister himself was prepared to accept the Vancouver consensus if—and he applied a condition—he got agreement for his package of constitutional changes. And I cannot believe that he would have taken that position concerning an amending formula that was neither sensible nor workable. He was bargaining with it. He was bargaining with the Vancouver formula but, by being prepared to bargain with it, he knew that if his bluff was called, if there was agreement with this price, then he would have to deliver on the package. So clearly on the question of principle, on the question of the merits, the Prime Minister of Canada himself accepts the Vancouver amending formula, as did every other first minister at that table in September.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Indeed, the government's leaked memo is at pains to list several advantages to the formula, advantages to Canada, and to minimize the disadvantages. One disadvantage, which the Prime Minister has talked about since that time, is that the opting-out formula might lead to what he calls a checkerboard effect. On page 28 of that leaked memo it said:

No amendment could be made without the consent of Parliament. So there would be a federal check on any checkerboard effect that might be brought about by "opting out": that is Parliament or the government could decline to proceed with an amendment where the provinces did not all agree.

Finally, the government's advisers from the Department of Justice contend that—and again I read from page 29 of the document:

—if the provincial consensus (on the Vancouver formula) . . . holds, the federal government could consider joining the majority position.

That was the secret advice, the secret decision of the Government of Canada prior to the first ministers' conference. Why will they not accept in public what they accepted in secrecy? Why will they not let Parliament act today on a formula which they were prepared to accept in September? What has changed? Why do they want to stop Parliament

from acting now to have our constitution here in Canada where we, in Canada, can work on it? The secret document went on to suggest appropriate arrangements on the side of details referred to earlier.

We know now that the provincial consensus on the Vancouver formula did hold. But the Prime Minister would not agree to join that clear consensus without agreement on his package. It was then the Prime Minister who stopped agreement. As I said earlier, no partner in our federation should now hold all of Canada up to ransom for their own hidden agenda items. The way lay open in September to patriation with the Vancouver formula. It lies open now. And beyond that achievement, which could be finalized in all stages in a matter of weeks, lies the prospect of having the means here in Canada for Canadians to amend our constitution, free from hidden agenda, free from veto, free from referenda, which could override the provinces and destroy the nature of the federal system, and free from blockage.

I believe we have a great opportunity here today to make the most out of unusual circumstances. There is great hope among the people of Canada that we can get an agreement on constitutional change. I remember going into the province of Quebec during the referendum campaign and speaking sincerely about the need for constitutional renewal. I know the attitude in western Canada, the region of Canada from which I come. I know there is a deep sense there that change is needed. I know that in every corner of this land there is a determination to end the colonial system that leaves our constitution in another country and that permits decisions affecting us to be taken by another government. There is a desire to have Canadians act, not only to bring our constitution home but to have it here where we can work with it.

The Prime Minister has amendments that he wants. The Leader of the NDP has amendments that he wants and I have amendments that I want. Premiers have amendments that they want. They can all be dealt with here in Canada and they can be dealt with in accordance with the Vancouver formula. I know I am approaching the end of my allotted time, and so I will conclude by saying that everyone in Canada wants to have constitutional change. Everyone in Canada wants to have our constitution here at home. The reason there is opposition to the government proposal is that they want to have Britain make changes which we believe should only be made here in Canada. They want to continue a colonial status which we want to end. But instead of holding up the House of Commons in debate, our party is today proposing a means by which the Parliament of Canada can act to bring the Constitution of Canada home, to be amended in Canada. It can be done if there is a will in the House of Commons to do it. I pray that there is that will, so that Canadians can change our own constitution here in our own country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I rise to participate in this—

Mr. Knowles: You mean "Mr. Speaker."