

Time and again, attempts were made in the House to amend the Meech Accord so that it would be acceptable on a broader basis in the country. This party, the Liberal Party, put forward nine amendments on two occasions when that proposal was before the House, but they were turned down systematically by the government. I believe other opposition parties did the same thing.

As I say, finally, at the eleventh hour, the Prime Minister decided to set up the Charest committee to examine possible methods of breaking that log-jam, based on the proposals made by Premier McKenna. The Charest committee did its very best and put out a report, but it was too late in the day due to the three-year deadline for accepting amendments to the Constitution which is in the present amendment formula. I will deal with that in a minute.

The present amendment formula, which was adopted in the Constitution of 1982, requires that an amendment be agreed to by seven out of the 10 provinces, representing 50 per cent of the population of Canada, plus the House of Commons and Senate of this Parliament. It also requires that when an amendment is initiated, either in a province or at the federal level in Parliament, that the required number of provinces must adhere within a three-year deadline from the date of the first proposal of an amendment in one of the houses of a province or of the federal government.

Because a lot of people did not know, I want to point out that most of the Meech Lake Accord—a good three-quarters of it—could have been accepted under the seven out of 10 amendment formula. Only three provisions in the Meech Accord required unanimous consent. The general amendment formula of 1982 was seven out of 10 provinces representing 50 per cent of the Canadian population, but there were certain measures that required unanimous consent—

Mr. Corbeil: Name them.

Mr. Allmand: Name them? One was the amendment formula itself, one was the amendments to the Supreme Court, and I forget the third one.

Mr. Corbeil: What was the main one?

Mr. Allmand: Well, I don't know. What was the main one?

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Mr. Corbeil: Quebec integration into the Constitution.

Mr. Allmand: No, no. The hon. member does not know the Meech Accord, himself. The Meech Accord dealt with the distinct society. The distinct society provision did not require that, if that is what he is talking about. The distinct society provision only required seven out of 10 provinces to agree to that particular proposal. It did not require unanimous agreement.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, eight out of 10 provinces agreed to all of the Meech Accord. Two did not. Two, at the last minute, were left opposing but, even then, I think Manitoba would have come on-side, if we had not run out of time and if the Prime Minister had not waited until the last minute, rolling the dice, as he said he had done.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Allmand: If the Prime Minister had taken the measures that he took late in the day, if he had taken those in January or February and set up the Charest committee at that time, then—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, there are some members in this House who do not have much respect for democracy. They are shouting from their seats because they do not like to hear what is being said. Even the members in this party over here, who participated in this ridiculous charade that took place at the time, only moved afterwards.

The point is that at the last minute the Prime Minister set up the Charest committee and then ignored its advice. If he had done that at an earlier date, the five core provisions proposed by the government of Quebec would have been accepted.

What was the amendment formula before 1982? I have just described the amendment formula of 1982. Well, before 1982, of course, there was no specific amendment formula. The Constitution of 1867, which was a statute of the British Parliament, did not provide for an amendment formula. Amendments were made by an address of the Parliament of Canada to the British Parliament requesting an amendment. But a constitutional convention had grown up whereby the federal government did not make such an address unless there was unanimous consent of all the provinces. That was a very inflexible amendment formula and it was very difficult to obtain amendments to the Canadian Constitution which was basically the British North America Act of 1867.