

Supply

Of course, this man lives in Quebec.

There can be no doubt that, after 125 years, there is ample scope to renew the federation. But the principal rationalization for a "deal", which has become a mantra in some circles, is "the need to decentralize power." Arrant nonsense.

Indisputably, Canada is today the most decentralized country in the industrial world. Most Canadian provinces are currently unable to finance properly their existing responsibilities. There is no convincing evidence, even in Quebec, that the citizens of Canada, as opposed to the provincial political barons, want significant further decentralization. No case has been made for savings flowing from decentralization.

Why, when we have so little confidence in our leaders, are we so eager to let them cobble together a "deal"?

Why should we allow the separatists, as will occur in a referendum on "federal offers", to attack the proposal without having to defend their position?

There is a second, equally dangerous form of dismantling of Canada being proposed. Until recently the issue of native "self-government" has been largely ignored by political commentators. The virtual silence is profoundly disturbing.

In fact, the current proposal to enshrine, for Canada's aboriginal peoples, an "inherent right to self-government" is evidence of national dementia.

Consider the following questions which are only some of those one might ask:

a) What is the underlying objective, the vision, behind the proposal? "Self-government" is simply a means. What is the end?

One must conclude that the government has abandoned any belief that native peoples are best served by integration into the mainstream of Canadian life. Is apartheid the goal? If so, how will that improve the life of the aboriginal peoples?

b) What is meant by an "inherent right to self-government"? No one in Ottawa, or are otherwise involved in the constitutional industry, has the faintest idea. The defence of this lunacy is frequently that other parts of the constitution have been subject to interpretation by the courts over the years.

It is one thing, after the fact, to find that as national conditions change, so do the interpretation and application of the constitution. It is quite another when those actually drafting the document have no idea of the meaning of the language they are using.

c) If the natives' right is "inherent", why must it be granted at all? A right which is inherent is more fundamental than any right which can be "granted" by a constitution. At best, the constitution is merely declaring the existence of the right, not creating it.

This may seem to be mere semanticism. It is not. If, as appears inevitable, the courts have to grapple with the concept in the future, they will have to consider what the word "inherent" means:

"Forming an essential or intrinsic element of; existing inseparably within an object or person; innate."

d) What are to be the continental limits of "self-government"? There is little doubt that Ottawa and the natives have dramatically different views. It appears, from Joe Clark's bafflegab, that Ottawa is thinking in terms of municipal governments. Anyone who accepts that the native leaders agree believes in Santa Claus and every other multiculture equivalent. Is it unreasonable that we, the citizens of Canada, its "owners" so to speak, insist that, before approving the "deal" that is going to save us from hellfire and damnation, our "servants" tell us what it means?

e) Assume for sake of argument, that all the parties agree that what is being discussed is a form of municipal government. A whole series of other questions, important but unanswered, arises. Since we have over a century of experience with municipal government, why have our leaders not simply defined self-government?

How many of these "municipal governments" are there to be? It appears native leaders consider that there are several hundred distinct aboriginal societies. Is each to be independently self-governing? Will they all be subject to the same rules? What is to be the territory of each of the self-governing units?

How is the new structure to apply, if at all, to those native Canadians who choose not to live within the boundaries of the "municipalities"? What is to be the relationship between the new level of government and the existing levels? To what extent will the native peoples continue to be governed by, for example, the Charter of Rights or the Criminal Code? A similar question can be raised as to the applicability of provincial laws.

The list of questions is endless. Either they have been answered, and the results are being concealed from us, or they have not. Both scenarios are disturbing: in neither case do our leaders merit support.

(f) To what extent is there unanimity of purpose among the aboriginal peoples? At first glance, there appears to be very little; the native women have not been reluctant to dissent from their male counterparts. Is it unreasonable to suggest that Ottawa should have required the native peoples to present offers they had previously adopted internally?

(g) Who is going to pay for the Canadian experiment in rewriting history, and how much?

When faced with these basic questions, which the media are too polite to put, lips will be sealed with Crazy Glue. We have the right to know the answers.

The real problem is that the answers are no doubt "the Canadian taxpayers and far too much". Vast sums are today spent on the affairs of Canada's native peoples. As we add yet another level of government, the cost will inevitably grow. As to whether there will be benefits to anyone but the elite of the aboriginal peoples, I am from Missouri.