

The Constitution

Why would they deal away a winning hand. What we are talking about, of course, is a power play or a power game being played by the provincial premiers and, of course, they will stand up on their hind legs and rear because they do not want to share any of their powers. It is far more important to them in their political mandates to amass more power and more influence. The question arises, though, whether this is good for the country. Is this really what is necessary at the present time having regard to the problems and conditions that we will face in this decade?

I am here as a western Canadian saying, "No, it is not what we need". If we allow devolution to continue and decentralization to take place, then we as western Canadians will have given away one of the great opportunities in this country to help our region grow. The fundamental assumption which is being made by members of both the Conservative party and the New Democratic Party is that it is only the provinces which can manage this new growth in western Canada, that it is only the provinces and provincial jurisdictions which should be the managers of the new wealth.

Mr. Malone: Who said that?

Mr. Axworthy: You have all been saying that.

Mr. Malone: Name one person.

Mr. Axworthy: I do not have time to name all of you. The fact is that we did offer concessions to the provinces. This seems to have been conveniently forgotten among the hysteria and exaggeration implying that somehow there is a Liberal conspiracy to destroy the provinces. I saw the list of concessions which was assembled for the constitutional conference. We were prepared to share the powers of taxation with the provinces on resources. We were prepared to share interprovincial trade and powers over communications and fisheries. Where was the conspiracy against the provinces in those concessions?

However, Mr. Speaker, if one looks at the other side of the ledger at what those generous, open-hearted visionary provinces were offering, it adds up to one big goose egg. They were playing the game of "heads I win, tails you lose". It was a classic no-bargain, no-win game. The federal government would have betrayed its fundamental mandate if we had even listened to that kind of blackmail. We went into those conferences with all the right intentions to bargain and to share and to deal with the provinces, but we did not get anything in return.

What we must really examine at this point, because I believe it is important to the debate, is really what kind of federal state is necessary to take advantage and develop the new-found opportunities of western Canada. There has been historically and is a strong and abiding role for the federal government, but this has been conveniently forgotten by hon. members opposite. When the prairies were in trouble during the depression, it was the federal government which moved in with the wheat board, the PFRA and other kinds of grain acts. It was the federal government which used its declaratory

powers to bring in the Wheat Board in order to protect the western farmer. Those are the very powers we are being asked to give away at the present time.

It embarrasses me at times to hear the kind of expressions which come from certain western politicians, including the premier of my province, who has no business saying what he says because we are a have-not province. We need equalization, not him saying, "Now that we have ours, we are going to keep it". Suddenly equalization, which was one of the basic touchstones for western Canada for many years, can be conveniently forgotten because we have discovered a big pool of oil and gas below our soil.

This kind of spirit in western Canada is not the kind of traditional spirit of which I feel a part. It may be the tradition which has been there historically, a kind of New Englander approach—how to shrink your horizons, in your dimensions and draw yourself into a fetal position for utmost protection. That is not the only point of view that is being heard in the west. There are many westerners who say they would like to share and the only vehicle and mechanism for that sharing is the federal government. That sharing must be in our interest as westerners as well as in the interests of the entire country.

In the next decade we will go through an amazing growth in the west. We will be putting billions of dollars into railroads, water systems, research and development and industrialization. By their nature there must be some degree of cross-regional management in these areas.

Mr. Lambert: Oh, oh!

Mr. Axworthy: I hear a harrumph from the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert). I am glad he has finally come awake in this debate. The fact is we must recognize the realities, not dreams and fantasies. Let me use an example from my own department.

Mr. Lambert: You would not dare make that speech in Winnipeg.

Mr. Axworthy: I have made that speech in Winnipeg five times in the past two weeks. I am going to the hon. member's province on Thursday to make it again, and he is invited to come. In fact, I will be glad to accept an invitation from the hon. member to speak at his next riding association meeting. They might find it educational.

● (2040)

Let us look at one dimension that concerns my ministerial responsibilities, namely, the enormous movement of people, both within and outside the region in western Canada. We are talking about the need to develop 30,000 or 40,000 skilled jobs per year for western Canada. We are talking about training hundreds of thousands of people over the next decade to do the work that is necessary to ensure the growth of the west. We are talking about trying to make sure that this enormous employment opportunity is available to the native people of western Canada and to women in this country. We are talking about using the enormous growth potential that exists.