

amendment no action be taken until the ten provinces have signalled their approval through like addresses.

Although the amending formula in this motion does not necessarily reflect either my personal or my party's position on an appropriate formula, unanimity among the 11 governments would be the most desirable and effective approach here. It would symbolize the breadth of our commitment as a nation to equality of opportunity and at the same time offer a basic point of common agreement from which to renew our constitutional dialogue.

On the issue of disparities there are two essential reasons for this motion today. First, and most obvious, is the widespread disparity of opportunity among Canadians. I believe these disparities are undeniable by any measure. They are to be found in living standards, income, employment, educational level, available social services, security, one's hope for the future and one's sense of purposefulness or meaningfulness within the Canadian confederation. As Joey Smallwood described the situation during the 1969 constitutional conference:

Some youngster is going to be born tonight somewhere east of that north-south line in Quebec or in the four Atlantic provinces, of whom you may say that a court has condemned that Canadian baby to an inferior existence—food not so good, home not so good, schools not so good, hospitals not so good, roads not so good . . . that child is condemned, as though a court had done it, to an existence inferior to the Canadian average.

What these disparities come down to, in very human terms, is that certain individuals, certain communities, certain regions are denied the opportunity open to their fellow Canadians to fulfil their dreams and aspirations whether as individuals or collectively. What hurts the most in admitting the range and depth of disparity across Canada is that so much of the solution lies within our power. The question is not whether we can eliminate disparity but, rather, whether we are committed and concerned enough as a nation to do anything about it. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) thinks we should be, noting in 1968 as follows:

● (1700)

If the underdevelopment of the Atlantic provinces is not corrected, then the unity of the country is almost as surely destroyed as it would be by the French-English confrontation.

Again, as recently as this month in his reference to inserting collective rights in a new constitution, he said:

[Translation]

"The right which people have to live in the part of Canada they like best and where they were born . . . without being penalized by not having access to equal opportunities."

[English]

Certainly no less a commitment was given by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) in Charlottetown last year when he said:

—regional disparity is an issue on the fringes of government policy-making instead of being a preoccupation at the centre of government policy-making when it should be and where it will be in a Progressive Conservative government.

Former prime minister Pearson stated at the 1968 conference that he regarded—

British North America Act

—the problem of raising economic levels in the Atlantic provinces as a principal aspect of the total problem of maintaining unity.

Or, as Premier Robichaud phrased it in 1968:

Canada's human cultural objectives may fail because they are not rooted in socioeconomic substance.

Past federal governments have also agreed and acted to reduce disparity. As far back as 1927 we had the first national pension scheme: in the 1930s, R. B. Bennett's reforms during the depression; later, the green book proposals and accompanying social legislation after World War II; then, of course, the first organized attempts to deal with disparity as a regional phenomenon under the Diefenbaker government through programs such as the Atlantic Development Board, ARDA, the adjustment grants, and so on; and in the late 1960s there was the creation and substantial funding of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion which attempted to co-ordinate programming and general policy-making for the federal government. In fact, apart from national unity it would be difficult to find a single theme upon which all administrations of all political stripes have been in such close accord, namely, that the disparity of opportunity between Canadians must be lessened and, if possible, eradicated. Yet disparity persists—even widening by some indicators.

Where we have been somewhat successful is in improving material living standards on an individual basis. But there has been almost no progress in helping those individuals, communities and regions to break the cycle of dependency to attain a position where their future is in their hands, coupled with the economic means to realize their potential. Providing to all a guaranteed standard of living has become increasingly the role of the federal government. Enabling them to do it for themselves has not.

The task is far vaster than can be undertaken by any government alone, with its limited resources, multitude of conflicting claims and pressures from vested interests. The task requires a mobilization and direction of our will and material resources on a scale not seen since the national policy of Sir John A. Macdonald. We need, in fact, a "new national policy" if we realistically expect to overcome disparity of opportunity among the individuals, communities and regions of Canada; one in which the federal government may provide leadership but which demands no less the same commitment from provincial governments and the private sector alike.

The task is truly immense. We must, for example, overcome the biases in our economic structure which deny to certain regions the opportunities afforded to others. We must overcome the biases in our culture which create the belief in countless Canadians that their way of life and goals are second-class compared to those of their fellow citizens. We must find and implement ways of convincing those with a material or psychological stake in the status quo that the national interest demands its restructuring. We must find ways of encouraging and involving the private sector in giving our disadvantaged areas the same opportunities for productivity as in the more fortunate regions. We must encourage individuals, especially in the poorer regions, to restore their faith in our