

be the most appropriate way to maintain the priority to move toward the ultimate constitutionalization of the concepts of self-government and aboriginal rights within the constitution.

It seems to me that it would be unrealistic for us to convene meetings which would take place on a formalized basis until we were able to examine with aboriginal groups the appropriate way to proceed at this point in our history.

As far as the federal Government is concerned, I assure Hon. Members that our commitment to aboriginal peoples and people in the territories of Canada remains. We believe that their rights are protected under the Accord and that there is a new prospect for movement in a constitutional way which did not exist prior to the Accord.

The final result of this meeting of minds in a unanimous way was to give us the prospect—and a happy prospect it is—that in the months and years ahead Canada will make progress and serve the best interests of its citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): There are still two minutes remaining in the 20-minute plus 10-minute total, so I will allow a question or comment by the Hon. Member for Regina East (Mr. de Jong).

Mr. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the remarks of the Hon. Minister and essentially agreed with much that he said. However, I missed any precise explanation from him about why he is opposed to the motion. What are the objections of the federal Government or any of the provinces to maintaining the system that now exists in allowing new provinces into Confederation? I do not understand who would object to the existing system. Why necessitate having all 11 provinces in agreement?

● (1230)

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, my answer will be brief and to the point with respect to those two elements put forward by the Hon. Member. I do not find it possible to sustain and support the motion because I do not accept the premise. It is not a question of restoring the rights of people in the Territories. I have explained with respect to the aboriginal people why a First Ministers' conference at this point may not be the best method. There is an understanding among aboriginal peoples that there has to be emphasis on a little different approach before a First Ministers' conference is called on aboriginal constitutional matters. That is not to say that these are not legitimate matters for First Ministers' meetings, but what we want to do is look at the most appropriate way to make sure we will have success. It is one thing to have a meeting but it is another thing to have success.

I do not think the New Democratic Party wants to go back to unilateralism on the part of the federal Government. I think New Democrats believe in the phrase co-operative federalism.

Mr. de Jong: Yes.

Supply

Mr. Hnatyshyn: I think we all agree with that. When we get involved in the policy question, a legal question has to be asked. If you add new provinces to our constitution that would affect such programs as equalization. Are we to move ahead without first having an understanding and consensus with all participants in our confederation on these issues, even with the positive merit of devolution of the Territories to provincial status in Canada?

Secondly, this does impact on the amending of our constitution. When you bring in new provinces, a new dimension is brought to the amending formula which, in another section of the present Constitution, requires unanimity having two-thirds of the provinces of the country representing 50 per cent of the population of Canada? If, by way of example, you create three new provinces in northern Canada, do you not first want to understand what the implications are for Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia or any province or region? What are the implications of such change, Mr. Speaker?

I am trying to suggest to the Hon. Member that these concerns are shared. The desire is to move ahead with the Territories in full consultation with them, but there are a number of considerations in our modern confederation which have to be taken into account, that cannot simply be overlooked for the sake of political rhetoric. We have to look at some real problems to see how we are going to address them realistically, recognizing that certain important constitutional elements will be affected if we do not have that unanimity for the establishment of new provinces.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. Debate.

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to ask you how questions and comments can be terminated when they started only a few minutes ago?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I think the Hon. Member realizes that the first speaker spoke for close to a half an hour. I am trying to balance the time for the first three speakers. The Minister took 32 minutes, to be exact, of his allotted time. I am now going to the Liberal Party. I would like to balance things off before the end of the day. If there is a problem and if the Hon. Member wishes the Chair to do something differently, would he please so advise?

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I thought that the Minister had sought consent of the House to finish his remarks. I believe in the exchange he would take four or five additional minutes to the 20 minutes allotted to him, then there would be a 10 minute question and comment period which would give us in the Opposition, both the New Democrats and the Liberals, a chance to question the Minister. We agreed to that, Mr. Speaker. I find it difficult now that you have combined the 20 minutes plus the additional time—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I do not find any problem with that at all. The Chair is the servant of the