

SPECTRUM

Senate reform - an answer to a national crisis?

The Montreal Gazette reported last Monday that our Federal Government is hiding the results of recent public opinion polls about their latest constitutional proposals in order to keep them from falling into the hands of 'enemies of the state'. The results, apparently, are simply too explosive. Among other interesting results, the polling firm had to phone an unusually large number of people because so many people just kept hanging up.

Now that's a public opinion poll that really tells you something.

Can anything good be said about the Son of Meech? Well, yes: Premier Clyde Wells of Newfoundland and the Premiers of the Prairies have managed to convince that almighty Albertan, Joe Clark, architect of the package, that the people will no longer accept amendments to their constitution that neglect to include serious Senate reform. In this sense, at least, this really is a Canada round, and the idea that Quebec should exercise exclusive control over the first round of constitutional amendment since patriation has finally been put to rest.

That's the first good reason to support these proposals. For two decades, Clyde Wells has been telling everybody that would listen that any federal union requires an upper chamber with equal representation from the regions to balance the enormous power of larger regions in the lower house, where the representation is strictly by population. This principle is sort of the first axiom of a workable federation, and its long neglect has led to the terrible asymmetry in Canada today, where the two central provinces wield almost all the political power. Even in the United States, for crying out loud, both California and Maine send exactly two representatives to the Senate.

This principle is the first E of the Triple E senate, and, unfortunately, the only one entirely missing from Joe Clark's carefully crafted package (which does, admittedly, provide that the Senate be both elected and effective). Actually, Joe's still calling this new Senate Triple E, but has changed the first E to 'equitable' and cleverly left the definition of the term to the monster all-party committee now furiously at work in Ottawa.

The deadlock that must be broken here is deeply pragmatic and as old as Confederation: how can the two central provinces share equal representation in the upper chamber to provinces as small as Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan?

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the semester, despite the fact that most of the other students have made their respective ways to class, could you tell (I presume with as little effort as possible on the student's part) what I missed?"

Dr. Know just smiled and said, "Oh yea, that one . . ."

At least, that's the perceived deadlock, since principle in politics is widely believed to lose to pragmatics nearly every time. While it is too early to tell, I suspect that we shall have to settle for some sort of regional representation, not quite equal, but still giving the Atlantic and Western provinces considerably more seats than at present. Whatever the final compromises, the new Senate is guaranteed to give the regions a much stronger voice at the centre, and that's another good reason to support the proposal.

Perhaps surprisingly, representation in the new Senate for Canada's First Nations has already been proposed, and, with near unanimous support from Canadians from coast to coast, promises to proceed without any serious hitch. And that, surely, is one of the best reasons to support the proposal.

The powers of the new Senate

PERSPECTIVES BY WILLIAM STEWART

won't be equivalent to those of the House of Commons, but they will be substantive. The most serious restrictions are on money bills, where the upper house will have no vote at all, and on matters of national defense, where it will have only a six-month suspensive veto.

On the other hand, the new Senate will have the responsibility of ratifying some of the most important appointments now made by the Prime Minister, including those of the heads of the CBC, NFB, CRTC, Canada Council, and the Governor of the Bank of Canada. This is a dramatic and radical proposal, opening up more than a dozen of Canada's most important federal

institutions to a sort of Canadian perestroika. Through open hearings similar to those just held by the American Senate on Judge Clarence Thomas's appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court, the Canadian people will have a direct input into the national institutions which so profoundly define our identity. And there's another good reason to welcome this proposal.

Joe Clark and the rest of the government have introduced their package purposely incomplete, and loudly proclaimed that it is alterable, changeable, and improvable. Over the next six months the Canadian people are going to have an opportunity to make their desires known, and if only for practical reasons, no package will go forward without widespread public support.

This development is the most promising aspect of the latest chapter in Canada's interminable obsession

with matters constitutional, and, if Joe Clark can be believed, there is a genuine possibility that Canada's 125th anniversary next year will be celebrated as a united country. For those who thought that already happened eleven years ago, and especially for those in the Atlantic and Western provinces, our new Senate may make the wait worthwhile.

The stumbling block, of course, is the deeply entrenched public disenchantment with process. Our Federal government is well aware of this, for while you and I may not learn the results of their recent public opinion polls, paid for with public money, they have now been on the Prime Minister's desk for over a week, and, mainly, they say that we are eagerly hanging up on the first question.

(Next week: Individual rights, Collective Rights, and the Distinct Society clause.)

What's in a word - the power of semantics

So, what's in a word anyone?...I've noticed that on some of the signs advertising the "WIMMIM'S Collective at the student radio station, that some defender of male, sexist views, crossed out WIMMIM'S and wrote women.

So what's your problem, eh? It's only a word, right? Wrong. Without even knowing it, this person or persons, have nicely led me to my next tirade...our language.

You know, when women want to change the spelling of woman to wimmim or womyn, people get upset. It's only a word, they say...lighten up, they say...don't get so defensive, they say. So then why do they get upset when we actually change it? Afterall, it's only a word, right? Wrong.

Words are power and to illustrate my point (yea, there is one here and yea, I'm getting to it) I want to tell you a story. I want to tell you herstory...this isn't entirely original here, by the way. It's a combination

of a column by one of my all-time favourite writers, Michelle Langsberg, in her book Women and Children First (a book I think everyone should read) and a point made in another book I've read called The Elements of Nonsexist Usage - A Guide to Inclusive Spoken and Written English.

So, keep in mind that I have reversed the generic term man and used woman instead. Picture it...

In the beginning god made woman in her own image. From woman came man.

Think of growing up in a world where you hear businesswoman, spokeswoman, chairwoman, she to imply he, made in "Her" own image. Think about herstory where your early ancestral relatives were cromagon, java woman, neanderthal woman - all cavewomen. Recall how feudal woman spread into Europe and built castles, how mythical woman developed around the Aegan and Mediterranean Seas. Remember

the discovering woman and exploring woman. Look at colonial woman who carved civilization out of the wilderness...pioneering woman...industrial woman...recall that all you have ever read uses only feminine pronouns - She and Her - but are meant to include both girls and boys and women and men.

Notice that most of the voices on the radio and most faces on TV are those of women, especially when important events are covered or important products are sold.

know that you have only a handful of men in a female dominated government and that every time these men try to represent your views they are ridiculed for their deep voices; for being too emotional and over-reacting.

Grow up being told males are the weaker sex because they don't have the ability to create and give birth to children. Male vulnerability needs female protection, so a man is taught the caring, less active virtues of

THE WIMMIM'S ROOM

homemaking. He is encouraged to keep his body lean and attractive and to dream of getting married, of belonging to a special woman - changing his name to hers, replacing that stilted "master" with the respectful "mister." He dreams of cooking for her and keeping house for her.

"I now pronounce you woman and husband" are the magical words he longs to hear. Then he waits for the time of fulfillment when "his woman" gives him a girl child to carry on her family name. He knows that if it is a boy child he has failed somehow - but he can try again.

Are you getting the picture of the feelings evoked by words? Are you aware of the words that bring the ideas to you in order to evoke the feelings? Are they ONLY words to you now?



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