

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

into great details, and tend to forget that the great majority of the people of Canada keep asking, "What does all this mean?" There is nothing new in the Meech Lake Accord. It has all been said by the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain. It is simply putting into written form what we have been practising for decades, more so at some periods of time than at others.

One of the first things that confronted me as a then young National Resource Minister was a problem that had been before the Governments of the United States and Canada for 10 or 15 years. That was how could we develop the waters of the Columbia which are shared by the two countries? Finally, after four years we reached an agreement. Then the academics, particularly in western Canada but also all across Canada to a degree, began to write article after article with all the facts and figures delineated in great detail in order to prove that Canada had sold out to the United States. Across the line equal numbers of academics—and my personal word is "nitwits"—began to write articles proving that the Americans had sold out to the Canadians. This went on for about eight years or nine years, each one copying the other fellow's paper and making it stronger.

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Finally, a professor from Simon Fraser came to me and said: "You were in charge of this operation for three years at the beginning". I said: "Yes, there were three of us on the committee". Then he said that he could not understand how these fellows could say that it was no good but for opposite reasons.

We set up a series of meetings, called "Academics Together", and brought in the people who had actually negotiated the agreement or treaty. In a few weeks everything died down. I am guilty of having said, when I first mentioned it in the House, that we would never know for 50 years who got the best in that deal.

Ten years afterward I had it reviewed quantitatively, and it showed that Canada was a little ahead in dollars and cents, \$100 million or so. The treaty was to last for 60 years and, if that trend continued, we would probably be ahead by half a billion or a billion at the end of the 60 years. In the meantime, large areas of both our countries were to have tremendous increases in power and a much lower rate than they could have got if they worked separately. It was good to both sides, but the interesting thing was that all these people quit writing about the thing. They never uttered a peep since.

I think—and we are half way through the deal now—that in another 20 years or 30 years they will want it renewed. The agreement was arrived at after careful consideration, and we worked under the International Joint Commission, which was set up in 1909 to ensure fair play in terms of the water which flows over our borders, and now air.

When we reach a major agreement or understanding such as this one, I would like to think that the same will prove true if we do not get caught up in the details and in trying to settle every problem in a single agreement. I think the Meech Lake

Accord, 1987, may well become one of the steps along the way to running a federal system and co-operating with other countries which have federal systems. There are a few federal systems in the world. The Americans were the first. I think Australia and Canada were second. However, that is not the point. It is a very unique form of governing large countries with many diverse interests.

All we have to do when we hear the words "Meech Lake Accord, 1987" is simply say that it is a political agreement among the provinces and the federal Government in general terms which are aiming in the same direction. We will quarrel a little back and forth on the division of powers, but if we work co-operatively it will work. In other words, the main significance of the Meech Lake Accord is for it to be a written document as opposed to the traditional way in countries with British background of simply going by custom and precedent and letting the courts move us forward slowly.

I repeat that the agreement is simply a written document on what we have been doing for the last 20 years or 30 years with various forms of success.

Turning to the argument that we can never have a perfect Constitution or agreement, I should like to indicate that 1987 is the two hundredth anniversary of the American Constitution. I know something about that Constitution in that I spent a whole year of my life working on a thesis on it.

Two hundred years ago they took leading intellectuals and politicians representing the 13 states in the Confederacy and put them in a little village several days or hours away by horse and carriage from the big centres. The village was Philadelphia. In fact, it took three days or four days to get to New York where the action was. They were isolated. In the five months or better which the politicians spent in daily discussion with the greatest collection of intellectuals, which certainly the United States and maybe the world had ever seen, they came up with what is now known as the American Constitution. These men were highly educated in the classical school of government particularly Confederations, over 3,000 or 4,000 years and, mixed in with some politicians who were practical, they finally came up with the Constitution. They tried desperately to make it perfect, but at the end of that time, Madam Speaker, you should have heard the howlings by participants warning of all the dangers.

However, the fact remains that 200 years later the Constitution is still in place, even though there has been over a score of amendments. It was set in general terms. All I can say today—and I know that they had to make amendments approximately 30 times—is that the Canadian British North America Act, which followed the American Constitution 100 years later, tried to be more centralist in control, but we too have survived over the years.

If we look carefully at the American Constitution and at where the power lies, we see that there was more power in the hands of their states than in the hands of their central Government. However, over the years they spread across the