

The Constitution

and this proposal will further exacerbate that issue and will create a double form of discrimination. We can only suspect there will be further alienation and bitterness as a result.

The reasons that we in western Canada are opposed to the amending formula are summed up quite succinctly on page 11 of the submission of the Premier of Saskatchewan, and I would like to put it on the record. It reads:

The proposed amending formula is the most unacceptable part of the federal resolution, the part which does most serious violence to the basic principles of federalism. Saskatchewan cannot endorse the resolution unless major changes are made in the amending formula.

In a federal state, the procedure for amending the Constitution is the most important part of the fundamental law. And the amending formula proposed in the resolution is so weighted in favour of the central government, so biased against the interests of the provinces, that it threatens to destroy the balance that is crucial to the maintenance of Canada as we now know it.

I think that sums it up fairly well.

Dealing with the interim amending formula, I can only agree that it is nothing more than an illusion, as has been alluded to by the hon. member for Provencher. This party offered an alternative amending mechanism. It may not be perfect, but I believe it is an approach which more accurately reflects the reality of Canada and at the same time sustains the fundamental federalist structure. I believe it can provide a basis for a strong central government without limiting the cultural and regional characteristics of Canada and, above all, it will respect the equality of the provinces.

The referendum proposal is something to which I object as well. To me, the binding referendum is a radical departure from the principle of parliamentary democracy. This particular feature of the package has the potential of being the most divisive element in this resolution. We were told it was only going to be used as a deadlock-breaking mechanism, but the reality is that the federal government could trigger it at any time, and, in effect, it becomes a form of amending formula. It is a device which could circumvent provincial authority and thereby significantly alter our federal system. And we know what can be done in terms of manipulating public opinion, manipulating the rules and the question and, what is most important, and as has been alluded to by other speakers as well, only the federal government has the right to initiate a referendum. If you can manipulate the question and the kind of advertising for which this government is so famous, you can certainly receive the kind of answer they would naturally want.

The process is another issue to which I object and much has been said about it. I cannot accept unilateral action. It just does not work in this country and is not in keeping with the Canadian tradition. Asking Westminster to invoke changes without the consent of the provinces is certainly most unfair. We are asking Britain to do what we cannot do legally in this country.

There are other deficiencies and omissions. A lot has been said about the perfection of this package, there has been a lot of fanfare, but what I find, Mr. Speaker, is that when you sort out the rhetoric, you find that this resolution is deficient in many ways. What I find most unfortunate is that, throughout the process, some glaring inequities, which have been with us

for many, many years, have been overlooked. They are inequities which have caused division in this country, which have caused alienation, and which have been ignored in the past and are being ignored in this measure as well. In many cases, those irritants are being exacerbated.

● (2030)

I give you as an example, Mr. Speaker, the matter of removing the equality of status of the provinces. The west is now, in effect, a minority. This measure will simply exacerbate that situation. Having total disregard for the provinces, in terms of its unilateralism is another measure. But what has been totally disregarded and ignored is the political inequality which exists in this country, inequality which shuts out one half of the country from the political process. To me, that is the number one issue in this country.

If it is language and cultural inequality which have caused the problems in Quebec, I say to you, Mr. Speaker, it is political inequality that is causing problems in western Canada today. That is what is at the root of the energy problem. It is at the root of western alienation. It is at the root and core of western separatism. Those irritants and those issues have not been addressed by this government, nor have they have been addressed in this resolution.

The west is dissatisfied because it is being ignored in the decision-making process. It is being left out. The west is a very dynamic and growing region, but it considers itself impotent because it does not have the political clout. That is why we have splinter groups and separatist movements springing up in the west. Unless there is some redress to this political inequality which will fester and continue to mount, it could be very detrimental to this country. We need electoral reform, be it Senate reform, be it proportional representation, or be it some other method. That balancing mechanism which was to be provided in the Senate has deteriorated to the extent where it is no longer useful.

I quote from page 41, of the Task Force on Canadian unity, which outlines the thought behind the Senate. It reads:

The role of the Senate and the method of selection of its members were extensively debated at the time of confederation. The method adopted was meant to counterbalance the principle of "representation by population" applied in the House of Commons. The Senate was intended to act as a house of "sober second thought" in reconsidering the legislation of the more "radically democratic" lower house, to protect the interests of private property (hence, the property requirements for membership), and to reflect provincial and regional interests.

The task force goes on:

Because of the method and the practice of appointment of its members which give the Senate at least the appearance of an institution rewarding friends of the government of the day, its credibility as a body representing regional interests and its general effectiveness have been undermined.

So we do not have that mechanism to provide for regional balance. The political inequality must be redressed. This is indispensable before the country can function harmoniously. All regions of Canada must be able to participate effectively in the decision-making process of our national government. If this is not done, tensions will build, divisions will grow and our federation will crumble.