

content—the members of this House, the public of Canada—to leave the constitution at Westminster for those 70 more years.

**Mr. Epp:** Nobody is saying we should.

**Mr. Nowlan:** You were here on Monday, you heard.

**Mr. Regan:** I heard the Leader of the Opposition and I will be turning to his remarks in due course.

**An hon. Member:** What are you talking about?

**Mr. Regan:** I appreciate the desire of hon. members to make interventions, but I want them to hear me out for a while.

**Mr. Epp:** Stay with the facts and we will.

**Mr. Regan:** I will stay very close to the facts indeed.

Each person is entitled in this debate to express his or her own opinion in this forum of democracy. Surely at the end of this debate, the rules for determining a majority will prevail only after a serious and detailed study of the provisions of the resolution and of possible alternatives. But as one legislator, the opinion I express and the way I shall vote will be in the direction of patriating our constitution at last in a final, substantive and also symbolically important move to establish our destiny as a great and free country.

● (1510)

It is high time we did this. No longer can excuses be found for further delay. Perhaps the hope that we harboured for so long in this country and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) pursued for some 12 years, that of achieving unanimity among ten provincial governments with ten different interests and points of view, was too much to cherish. Certainly the president of the United States would not call together the 50 governors and expect them to agree unanimously on anything. Let me give an example.

There are deeply-held views as to whether civil rights should be entrenched in the constitution. I happen to believe it should be in today's society, but is it likely or logical that ten premiers would have a unanimous opinion on whether civil rights should be entrenched? If you take any ten people, one or two will feel the system works better without entrenchment of rights. I think the majority would feel they should be entrenched. I use that to illustrate that to achieve unanimity on all the items that go together to make up this resolution is a virtually impossible task.

If one accepts my position that inability to achieve unanimity cannot be allowed to thwart indefinitely the aspirations of the Canadian people to bring their own constitution to Canada, the next question that follows is whether we have tried hard enough and long enough to achieve unanimity and whether further efforts would be likely to yield different results. On that point I speak from the vantage point of having participated in the constitutional renewal process as a provincial premier from, if you like, the other side of the table and the other point of view.

### *The Constitution*

While I served as premier of Nova Scotia, I participated in the constitutional first ministers' conference at Victoria in 1971. In succeeding years, I took part in 23 first ministers' conferences. In Victoria, there were people like Premier Strom, for whom I have always had a great respect, Premier Bourassa, the late W. A. C. Bennett and various others who were premiers at that time. Those who held office changed as years passed.

In those 23 first ministers' conferences I came to know how they operate in closed sessions as well as in public. Of course, the talk changes when the prime minister and the premiers go into a closed room. Nine and a half years ago in Victoria we came closer to unanimity on the constitution than ever before, or since. We were closer than is likely ever to happen again, given the emergency of the resource issue and the growing tendency of many premiers to hold Canada's aspiration for patriation of the constitution hostage for the yielding of ever-more federal powers to the provinces.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Regan:** My remarks are consistent. When I was a provincial premier, I believed in a strong central government as being the essence of Canada, and as a "fed", I continue to believe in it just as strongly.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Regan:** I do not fault some premiers because they have a different view of their responsibilities. They have the problem of meeting the demands of their people and the frustration of limited powers in doing so. Some would say these negotiations have dragged on. As new issues have come forth, they would agree to entrench civil rights if more federal power would be given to the provinces. They want to trade the people's rights for more power for their governments.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame!

**Mr. Regan:** I do not even say "shame!" I say it is unfortunate. It is misguided. It is not a process that will bring us a new Canadian constitution because we already have the most decentralized federation in the free world. We must retain a residual amount of power, financial power, in the central government or the country will become balkanized with very different levels of standard of living and nothing in common which can hold nationhood together.

For a period of time after Victoria and in those succeeding conferences, I believed that continuing efforts would overcome the outstanding issues. At Victoria we came very close. Only one government held out against unanimity. I thought that through compromise, persuasion, the passage of time and other meetings we might perhaps achieve unanimity. What I did not then realize but now see clearly is that it does not work that way. The identities of premiers and parties of government keep changing. If there is one characteristic of a new government, it is the desire to distinguish its policies from that of its predecessor. It seems to be a primary requirement for new governments to do this, regardless of what their politics may be. The result