

Constitution Amendment, 1987

The Canadian Advisory Council has done excellent research on behalf of women in Canada. I have said that many times and I certainly respect their right to make decisions and hold their own consultations, as they have done many times. Indeed, I have been a speaker at many of those consultations and conferences.

I fully understand my role *vis-à-vis* the council and other women's groups in this country, both in terms of listening to them and forwarding their views. We will not always agree with all of the groups that appear before Members of this Chamber. There are as many opinions among women as there are among men and that is why I believe our discussions have been fruitful and should continue. The issues concerning the Charter will not be resolved with one consultation or one conference, but should be considered over time as an integral living part of the Constitution.

Mr. Manly: Madam Speaker, the report of the special joint committee places considerable emphasis on the difference between legality and legitimacy. It points out that while people can claim rightly that Quebec has always legally been bound by the Constitution, the Constitution of 1982 lacks legitimacy within Quebec and with the people of Quebec.

In the same way, I suggest to the Minister that this Accord lacks legitimacy with many of the women of Canada and with the majority of women's organizations in Canada that have studied this report. Is the Minister prepared to remove the doubts that exists among women and women's organizations that the Charter protects their rights from any changes that are brought about by the Accord? Will she ensure that this new Constitution is not only legal but also has legitimacy among Canadian women?

Mrs. McDougall: Madam Speaker, I believe the best way to do that is to provide a procedure whereby the Charter is given pride and place in the kind of monitoring that is recommended by the committee.

I have looked at all of the opinions. I am not a lawyer, so it is the legitimacy that concerns me as much as the legalities. I believe that there is a great deal of legitimacy to the Meech Lake Accord. I understand what was in the joint special committee report. However, I think that in terms of where we go from here, the balance that was achieved in the Meech Lake Accord between the Constitution and the Charter, and the entry of Quebec into Canada, is a very delicate balance. It was achieved. It is something that we on this side of the House are very proud of on behalf of the people of Canada whom we and other Members in this Chamber represent, as well as the regions of Canada that are represented by their elected Premiers as well.

● (1620)

Our celebration of the Accord recognizes that within the whole constitutional process there is always considerably more that can be done, and will be done, because there is now a

process in place to recognize the vitality and the life that exists within this document for the future.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Madam Speaker, I rise today to join this debate on the Meech Lake Accord.

[Translation]

First and foremost, I wish to talk about Quebec. As all Canadian men and women and as a representative of the North, I am delighted that at long last, Quebec men and women now officially adhere to the Constitution. I think that was necessary for the progress of the Canadian Constitution. For many years, a large number of Canadians felt quite concerned about the unfulfilled promise made during the referendum. Now, for Quebec, as a result of the Meech Lake Accord, it has become a reality. I must clearly state that I realize how very important is the Accord for Quebec as well as for the rest of Canada. But it is with anger and sorrow that I hear people say that Canadian Northerners seem to be against Quebec. It is untrue and unfair. Most of the Northerners I represent are quite happy with Quebec being part of the Accord. Now, Madam Speaker, I must deal with the problems which this Accord has created for Northern Canadians.

[English]

People in the territories to whom I have spoken feel strongly that the lack of consultation and the lack of participation in the democratic process in the formation of the Meech Lake Accord have been an insult and, more importantly, patently unfair to Canadians occupying one-third of the land mass of Canada. Perhaps it will be the Québécois who understand best what we are saying in the northern territories when we speak of feeling like second-class citizens because we feel that our voices are not being heard and our opinions not respected.

As the Government leader of the Yukon said in his presentation to the constitutional committee, "Quebecers also know the exasperation of abandonment. The failure of fair treatment for Quebec has remained a haunting and collective embarrassment. Has no lesson been drawn from this? Is there no concern for the aspirations of Canada's two northern territories, two potential partners in Confederation?" It should not be in a mature society that 75,000 citizens of that country have no voice, that their duly elected representatives and legislatures are unrecognized in the creation of something as fundamentally important as the development of a Constitution for this country.

For many, I regret to say, at least those above the 60th parallel, it may be seen as the southern Constitution. This is not fair. This is not right. This is not against Quebec. This is not the way to build an integrated and a whole Canada.

In 1981, an article in *The Globe and Mail* under the heading of "Selling the North" stated as follows:

The people of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, both natives and white, have been used as bargaining counters in the constitutional argument between the Prime Minister and the Premiers.