

*The Constitution*

House that they should never forget this fact, because it is fundamental to the debate we have begun today.

The then Prime Minister and the provincial Premiers who took part in the referendum debate clearly indicated their desire to do everything they could to find a balance that would be acceptable to Quebecers within the Canadian federation, in recognition of the fact that because of its language, its civil code, its history and its traditions, Quebec had a distinct identity within the Canadian federation.

Thanks to the 1982 Constitutional Accord, this country was able to achieve several objectives which I supported at the time and still do. The entrenchment of a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Canadian Constitution and the patriation of the Constitution to make Canada a fully sovereign state, capable of changing the basic laws of our country right here, without having to go to a foreign parliament—these were major, positive steps.

I have always thought, and I still do, that although the 1982 Constitutional Accord did not meet the legitimate aspirations of Quebecers who support national unity, it was because at the negotiating table, a separatist Quebec government was seeking formulas that would support its concept of independence, not the unity or enhanced unity of this country.

The 1982 Constitutional Accord was an unfinished symphony, and to finish it, it was necessary to approach the Quebec question in such a way that the parties concerned would accept the premise that no solution would be possible without recognition of Quebec's distinct identity within the Canadian federation. Quebec would also need the assurance that the rules of the constitutional game would not be changed with respect to the fundamental tenets of the federation, without the consent of the province of Quebec.

Therefore, in addition to the recognition of the distinct character of Quebec, the new constitutional balance was to provide security to Quebec at two different levels; first, at the level of immigration and second, at the level of the amending formula. The Meech Lake Accord positively answers the immigration issue. I do not intend to deal further with this matter on which there seems to be a general consensus. Moreover, the resolution that was passed by the Liberal Party of Canada at its convention in November, 1986, stated somewhat the same idea which is to entrench in the Canadian Constitution the Cullen-Couture agreement.

As for the amending formula, I readily admit that I would much rather have the Victoria formula than that contained in the Meech Lake Accord. The Leader of the Official Opposition stated this morning some reservations which I share not only with regard to the amending formula but also about the meaning of some words appearing in the Meech Lake Accord. The intent of the legislator should be clearly indicated. Otherwise, the problems which were supposed to be solved could be compounded in the future. For example, there are some sincere and honest concerns about the capacity of the

Government of Canada as a result of the Meech Lake Accord to intervene in regional economic development.

• (1530)

I do not think that we can brush aside these concerns simply because they are voiced by people from Atlantic Canada, Manitoba or Quebec. In my opinion, as we deal with this problem, we must bear in mind that the wording should be precise enough so that the text of the Constitution does not say things that are not intended and does not cause unnecessary division. I shall take spending power as an example.

I could go into a fiery plea against the limitation of spending power and argue that Quebec should never have accepted this text, since for the first time in the history of our country, it shall be written in the Canadian Constitution that the Federal Government has the right to intervene in matters of exclusive provincial jurisdiction. But I do not believe that such is the intent, as some would see it, since the argument of those who are against the limitation of spending power is the exact opposite.

I therefore submit that it should be possible to give a precise wording to what was the intent of the Prime Minister and the Premiers who met at Meech Lake. In my view, it is simply a question of coming to an understanding which will avoid unnecessary disputes in the future.

Coming back to the amending formula, I can say that given the circumstances and taking it for granted that what is essential has been preserved, since Quebec, as the other provinces of Canada, shall have a right of veto with regard to those institutions which are fundamental to the Canadian federation, I feel that the compromise which has been reached is essentially adequate and reasonable and that it deserves to be supported.

That is why, inasmuch as the legal wording that the Government will bring forward at the end of May does translate in a clear and precise fashion the basic principles contained in the Meech Lake Agreement, I shall support the agreement, Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, not only in this House but also in Quebec and all across Canada.

[English]

The Meech Lake Accord, Mr. Speaker, represents a conception of Canada that may depart from the vision of some. I understand the view expressed by my colleague from Saint-Henri—Westmount (Mr. Johnston). The kind of Canada he is dreaming of is the one that Sir John A. Macdonald advocated leading up to 1867. It was not possible then, and it is not possible today.

The idea of uniting Canada's two founding peoples, peoples with varying regional and cultural interests, under the umbrella of one all-powerful central Government is an old and long-enduring dream on the part of some. In fact, the dream of a centralized governed Canada started as a pragmatic policy as early as 1822, when the merchant class of Upper Canada suggested that, in order to spread the cost of building the first