

Constitutional Accord

Canada and of Canadians. He has said that a Constitution needs to address the aspirations of the country's people and not necessarily of the country's political leaders. He also spoke very passionately about how the Accord treats and addresses the first citizens of Canada, the aboriginal people. I appreciated his passionate plea for bringing down to earth what a Constitution is supposed to be. In essence, a Constitution is supposed to define its country and its people.

Toward that end, I would like to ask the Hon. Member a question. Having spoken to the people, having recognized the aboriginal fact of Canada, and acknowledging the fact that there is both a French and an English heritage in Canada, would the Hon. Member be supportive of an amendment that would add in Clause 1 the fourth indisputable reality of Canada, which is its multicultural nature?

Multicultural Canadians have made contributions to Canada, not only in contemporary times but in fact in history. The aspirations of that sector of society for their children in years to come should be recognized. There is a belief in Canada that Canadians who are of neither French nor English origin have somehow been relegated to a second-class status. These people have been included in the Constitution as a footnote in Section 16. However, Clause 1 at the beginning of the Constitution basically sets out what Canada is. Would the Hon. Member support an inclusion of the concept of Canada being made up of four fundamental characters, the French, the English, the aboriginal and the multicultural people?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The Chair would appreciate a short answer from the Hon. Member for Annapolis Valley—Hants (Mr. Nowlan).

Mr. Nowlan: It is a very fundamental and important question, Madam Speaker, but my answer can be short.

Just as an aside to my friend from Yorkton—Melville who spoke of the Constitution and of Trudeau and the worst events let me say that the Constitution must cover all events and it must be for good times and for bad.

I think my hon. friend has just raised one of the real questions that must be resolved. I know what he is getting at in the abstract. I will wait and see what will be done through amendments.

I am a political realist and I think the Hon. Member is as well. When 10 Premiers and a Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) put their signatures to a document, it will take a lot of public persuasion to ensure that these are the necessary changes to reflect the reality of Canada, which I think is what the Hon. Member has suggested that it is.

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Madam Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski), on behalf of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn), has put before us a very important matter that requires some comment. As you know, Madam Speaker, the people who will be appointed to the special joint committee to examine the Accord will have a very

noble and important task ahead of them. They will be examining an extremely important, significant and historical document.

What distresses me about the proposal of the Minister of Justice is that he has set out in the rules for this committee a deadline for reporting back to the House of September 14. I find that extremely difficult to understand and actually unacceptable.

The House of Commons can debate for over a year the question of capital punishment. It can debate for six months the question of pornography. It can debate for months and months the question of the cost of prescription drugs and medicine. Yet when it comes to this fundamental, basic document, the super-law of Canada, the Government has set a time limit of three months, including the summer months, for deliberation and examination of such a fundamental document. That I wish to raise in the strongest possible terms as being a ludicrous way of dealing with the Canadian Constitution.

A time limit puts undue and unnecessary pressure on members of the committee to report back to the House on a matter that is extremely difficult and which must be explained. Some of us have enormous difficulties understanding it, and I will mention that again in a few moments. As well, the public needs the time to absorb the issue.

I thought that a columnist here in Ottawa put it very well a few days ago when he wrote that the Accord can be examined not as a sacred text from Mount Sinai but as the flawed work of 11 politicians burning the midnight oil and jockeying for advantage, and that it can be held up to the light to check for cracks. I think that is a good way of describing the substance of this document. It needs a very thorough examination, and the time limit on that process is unacceptable.

• (1330)

As presently written, the Meech Lake Accord, as you must have noticed from Question Period, editorials and articles, raises many questions. I will deal with only a few of them. First, Clause 1 does not really reflect the composition of today's Canadian society. That matter was raised in Question Period by my colleague, the Member for York West (Mr. Marchi), only a few minutes ago. The description of Canadian society in Clause 1 must definitely be amended in order to provide for recognition of the existence of Canadians whose language is neither English nor French but who are Canadian citizens and make daily substantial and phenomenal contributions to the fabric and substance of this society.

Second, and of equal importance, as has been raised by others, in particular the Member for Cochrane—Superior (Mr. Penner), is the importance of recognizing, not as an afterthought at the end of the document but in Clause 1, the existence of the aboriginal peoples. I congratulate and salute my colleagues for having raised that so forcefully, intensively and repeatedly in the House of Commons in preceding days.