

in one place to a wide cross-section of parliamentarians. I believe this will encourage a continuity and a coherence to the important work of Parliament on this matter. In short, a special joint committee will provide a truly national focal point for our deeper understanding of the constitutional Accord.

● (1020)

I should like to review for a moment the events which led us to this point. Members will recall an earlier historic step in this evolution. In April 1982 our Constitution was patriated from London with its own all-Canadian amending formula and with a Charter which guarantees our fundamental rights and freedoms.

Unfortunately, this achievement was flawed because Quebec, which represents over a quarter of the Canadian population, did not accept the legitimacy of the political accord which had been signed by the Prime Minister and the Premiers of the nine provinces in November 1981.

[Translation]

In a speech delivered in Sept-Îles in 1984 the Prime Minister promised that if his Party were elected to office one of his priorities would be to conclude an agreement which would make it possible for Quebec to join the Constitution with honour and enthusiasm. He also stated he would take a different approach to federal-provincial relations, on the basis of national reconciliation.

[English]

That is the end of that, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Benjamin: Encore.

Mr. Nystrom: *Chukay, chukay!*

Mr. Mazankowski: I am wondering how our reporters will interpret that comment.

In 1985 the Liberal Party of Quebec published its conditions for adhering to the Constitution of Canada as part of its electoral program. In early 1986, following its election, the Government of Quebec in a major public statement set out these conditions in considerable detail. During the course of 1986 and in the early months of this year, both the Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party of Canada adopted positions concerning Quebec in the Constitution. These processes generated widespread public interest and comment.

In the year leading up to the Meech Lake Agreement there have been extensive discussions and negotiations among the federal and provincial Governments at the level of First Ministers and senior officials. The next step in bringing the First Ministers' agreement to fruition lies with our federal and provincial legislatures. Unlike the 1982 constitutional amendments when only Parliament had to adopt a resolution before the amendment was passed by the British Parliament, the

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current proposed changes will be presented for debate and adoption in every provincial and federal legislative chamber.

I would expect that members of all Parties in their approach to the deliberations of the committee to be established by this motion, and in reflecting on the representations which are made before the committee, will not allow whatever concerns they may have with certain particular aspects of the amendment resolution to obscure the main goal which we all share, namely, the voluntary and complete adherence by the Government and the people of Quebec to the Constitution of Canada.

In considering proposals for changes to the amendment resolution or for additional elements which are not reflected in it, we should be mindful that the constitutional Accord itself provides for a subsequent and continuing set of constitutional discussions to address other constitutional issues at annual conferences of First Ministers on the Constitution. The first is scheduled to take place before the end of next year.

We must also not lose sight of the fact that if the amendment resolution is not approved by Parliament and all the legislatures, these subsequent constitutional discussions will not take place because Quebec will continue to decline to participate in them. Canada's constitutional development in these circumstances would be frozen, probably for many years to come, and it would be difficult to overstate the serious consequences to national unity if that were to occur, especially since we have progressed so far in recent months.

A final factor to consider in approaching the deliberations of the parliamentary committee is that by virtue of the amending formula contained in the Constitution Act, 1982, neither Parliament nor any of the other legislatures, nor Governments acting alone, can bring about alterations in the amendments proposed in the constitutional resolution. The amending procedure requires the approval of all legislatures. Thus, if Parliament or any other legislature moved to amend the resolution, the entire process of securing the approval of the various legislatures would have to be recommenced.

The constitutional Accord stands as a tribute to a shared vision of a revitalized and more harmonious federation—a better Canada, one where the Province of Quebec will play an integral part. Indeed, the constitutional Accord is a true reflection of the Government's commitment since 1984 to establish a new period of national reconciliation with greater harmony and co-operation between the two levels of Government.

With this Accord we are indeed a stronger and more united nation. The efforts of this joint committee will require the support and goodwill of both the House of Commons and the Senate. I am confident that the members of the joint committee will receive this support and be equal to their task. I have every confidence that their activities will be guided by the generosity and the openness which have characterized the constitutional deliberations of the House to date. The work of this committee will constitute an important step forward in the constitutional evolution of our nation.