

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

● (1240)

The Italians, Greeks, Portuguese and Asians all have their own culture and do not want to be identified with either francophones or anglophones. They want to keep their independence. This is what makes Quebec different. What makes it different is the francophone majority which is increasingly asserting its position. It is not taking the place of anyone else, but assuming its own rightful place.

As for the Italian community, we can look at what is happening in Saint-Léonard. A Quebec television station has a program which shows how the francophone and Italian communities live in the same regions in harmony which keeping their own identity.

When I see my colleague from Saint-Henri—Westmount (Mr. Johnston) say that federal Members from Quebec will be less important, I tell him that in hockey when one realizes that the game gets too fast, it is time to hang one's skates, because development and progress are increasingly quicker. And whoever is unable to follow the pace should not try to stop the others but drop out and leave his place to someone younger. Such is evolution!

Mr. Speaker, I think that with this kind of Constitution . . . and when he wants us to believe that a Quebec Member, if ever the distinct society concept is accepted and Quebec is given jurisdiction over communications, will never be able to become Minister of Communications. If we draw up the Constitution to see what job we can have in Ottawa, we might as well not have a Constitution at all.

Once again his argument is at fault. As far as the Canada Pension Plan and the Quebec Pension Plan are concerned, Quebec has autonomy in its field. We have had Mrs. Monique Bégin as Minister of National Health and Welfare as well as Mr. Marc Lalonde, but even while Quebec was exclusively responsible for the Quebec Pension Board, the others were responsible for the Canada Pension Plan. Medicare and hospital insurance are administered by the provinces. We have had someone from Quebec. Let us assume that the Member for Saint-Henri—Westmount (Mr. Johnston) or the Member for Mount-Royal (Mrs. Finestone) are right, then the Quebec Members in Ottawa would have to do their best because their provincial colleagues would have some of the powers. This is all very well, then we will have better representatives in Ottawa and the French-speaking Members from Quebec have never been afraid of competition. We have never feared competition, because we always have had to fight and I know that my children will have to fight in that Parliament.

However, do not try to delude me. I congratulate all Canadians for having thought out the concept of the distinct society. The last election has clearly shown that people want to be rid of those who decide or want to undermine the French culture. In Ontario, they put Grossman out. People no longer want that kind of representatives.

I hope that those who are against the distinct society will change their mind; however, I respect the views of my other colleagues from all parties who would like to have protection for the native people. I understand them. However, I do not approve the Tory, NDP or Liberal Members who say that the concept of the distinct society would maintain the status quo. And they suggest we here in this House are adopting an incomplete agreement, well in 1982 it was just as incomplete. Even with Prime Minister Trudeau it was incomplete. He himself recognized the distinct nature when we had him include the so-called Canada clause with respect to the teaching language in Quebec. In the other provinces, it is the universal clause. That did not please the Prime Minister of Canada. As a constitutional amending formula, he preferred the Victoria formula but he yielded. Canada is a consensus, and such is the reality of the time. It is not the nature of a provincialist Member to support the Meech Lake Agreement, but of a federal Member, of a Member seeking the good of all Canadians. And it is my view that my colleagues, both in the NDP and the Conservative Party, who suggest that because we support the Meech Lake position that allows Quebec to concur in the Canadian Constitution we are taking a provincialist decision, are making a tremendous error, because as long as Quebec is left aside, the Canadian Federation is wobbly. It is like a four-wheel car that has lost a wheel. Quebec is an important wheel in the process.

Mr. Speaker, I support the amendments put forward by my Party, and I also blame the federal Government for not accepting a few improvements, for not showing the leadership needed to contact the other provincial Governments. That was done in 1982. Mrs. Judy Erola—unfortunately she is no longer here, but were she here—Concerning women who had the will to fight despite the fact that the nine provinces with the then Prime Minister had signed an agreement . . . Mrs. Erola, along with women groups from all across the country, forced the First Ministers and the House of Commons to bring in other amendments. Like the request by Mr. Claude Ryan, for Quebec once again—to meet Quebec's claims—like the Canada clause I referred to earlier concerning the teaching language. Here again the provincial Governments accepted.

To all those men and women who steadfastly want to add something, I say it can be done in my view. Is there one Canadian Prime Minister who can publicly tell his cultural communities: No, I cannot include you in that agreement? Is there one provincial Premier who can tell his cultural communities who call on him: No, I cannot include you? I am sure of that, and I strongly urge the Prime Minister to show leadership in that regard.

As far as the native people are concerned, I understand that the situation is much more difficult, but it is to be hoped that their turn will come too eventually.

But this time, Quebecers have accepted to adhere to the Constitution. They could have refused. I suggest we should commend Mr. Robert Bourassa, Quebec's Premier, for performing this miracle. It is Robert Bourassa who managed