

The Constitution

Mr. Speaker, I shall conclude on a positive note, and I will be commenting further once we get the final draft of the constitutional text.

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between what has just been said by the New Democratic member and the premise of the question put by the Hon. Member for Burnaby after Question Period. It seems the New Democrats on one side of their mouths support changes to the Supreme Court of Canada, and on the other side they oppose them. May I ask whether that Party accept the change that gives provinces the right to appoint judges to the Supreme Court?

Mr. Toupin: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to try and answer that question, which I feel sure is not partisan, and I will refer to what the Hon. Member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent), our Party Leader, stated at noon.

● (1620)

[English]

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, since the Leader of the New Democratic Party did not express a view about that, I hope he will soon. I also want to ask about the resolution put forward by the New Democratic Party on the question of the adhesion of Quebec in the Canadian Constitution. In its resolution passed at the national policy convention in March, 1987, Quebec is given the right to opt out and receive financial compensation when programs in provincial jurisdiction are transferred to the federal level. No other province is given a similar right in the resolution of the New Democratic Party.

I am more concerned that the resolution of the New Democratic Party does not require that Quebec, upon opting out, provide a compatible program which meets national objectives. From the speech of the Hon. Member—

[Translation]

One can take it the New Democratic Party has now changed its resolution in order to require that, on programs usually coming within provincial purview, Quebec must now have an equivalent program that follows the same objectives, or are they still with the resolution they adopted in March?

Mr. Toupin: Mr. Speaker, in that respect, the decentralization of powers, I would perhaps like to make available to him a letter sent by Mr. Broadbent to Mr. Trudeau in 1980, which clearly shows the feeling and belief of our Party concerning decentralization to provinces but, as I said, under certain conditions.

Second, I will finally refer the Hon. Member to our convention held last March in Montreal, during which we came up with a unanimous resolution on the official recognition of the unique nature and the principle of decentralization.

Mr. Speaker, I feel we have been clearly consistent.

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, let us take for example a daycare policy, and this is hypothetical, since we all know that Quebec

is very progressive, but we have to ask that question to explain the position of the Party.

If all provinces agree unanimously to a daycare policy, the cost of which would be shared between the federal and provincial Governments, except Quebec which refuses to meet national objectives or to agree to a program compatible with national objectives, would the resolution of the New Democratic Party still apply or would they nevertheless give a compensation to a province which is not willing to offer an equivalent program?

Mr. Toupin: Mr. Speaker, I think, as I said before, that the position of our Party on decentralization is very clear. This kind of question should have been addressed to the Hon. Member for Saint-Henri—Westmount (Mr. Johnston).

[English]

Mr. William C. Winegard (Guelph): Mr. Speaker, I am most pleased and honoured to take part in this debate on the Meech Lake Agreement. The events of April 30 will long figure prominently in the history of our country.

[Translation]

At last, the Canadian constitutional family was reunited.

[English]

As the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) said to this House on May 1, the Meech Lake Agreement “enhances the Confederation bargain and strengthens, I believe, the federal nature of Canada”. He, along with the other First Ministers, deserve our heartfelt congratulations. In particular, the Prime Minister’s leadership and negotiating skills were decisive in bringing this question to a successful resolution. It was an act of statesmanship by him and all the First Ministers. The agreement has won many positive and constructive comments from across the country.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, this motion is of great importance to Quebec, naturally, but the commitment of that province to further constitutional reform is also significant.

[English]

No one should be led to believe that the Meech Lake Agreement closes the book on constitutional reform. In fact, a failure at Meech Lake would have spelled continued constitutional blockage. That which has been achieved is only the conclusion of the most recent chapter. There is still a great deal to be done. In particular, we must address the constitutional priorities of special interest to certain provinces and regions. Among the priorities of greatest interest, especially to the west, I believe, is Senate reform. The desire for Senate reform reflects a wish to participate fully in decision-making at the national level. It is based on the belief that each region should feel that it counts.