

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

campaign on this issue, and our statements and our commitment were realistic and sincere. We must also realize it was an enormous task, to which our Government and the ten other Governments across Canada would have to bring the political will to take action and to deal with a problem that was an extremely important one for this country. From the outset, we see both the importance and the delicate nature of this commitment, if only because of the number of governments involved in the process. We therefore had every reason to believe and to hope that someday we would be able to debate a resolution in this House whose ultimate effect would be to bring Quebec into the Constitution. However, as so many other Canadians today, I admit I am somewhat surprised to be standing here before you.

I would like to take a few moments, Mr. Speaker, to recall the historical context that brings us before the House today. Without going back too far, I think we can, at least, with a degree of nostalgia for some, go back to the 1980 Referendum, when Quebec, after several years of debate, finally made its decision to keep the province within the Canadian federation. Mr. Speaker, you will recall the various statements made during the 1980 Referendum, including statements made by the then Prime Minister of Canada, who told Quebecers: We Canadians from all over Canada want you in Canada. If you vote no, you will be saying yes to Canada. It will be a solemn affirmation of the fact that you intend to remain within Canada, and we Canadians promise to help you remain within our Canadian federation.

We then had the 1981 negotiations, Mr. Speaker, followed by unilateral patriation in 1982.

We also recall the sad period when the Quebec National Assembly, including the provincial Liberals led at the time by Mr. Ryan, the same provincial Liberals who are now led by Mr. Bourassa, unanimously adopted a resolution denouncing the 1982 repatriation of our Constitution, which they described as a reprehensible action, an act of betrayal against Quebec, while the Premiers of certain provinces, with the support of the federal Liberals, had decided to ignore the wishes of Quebec and everything they had said during the 1980 referendum to repatriate the Constitution unilaterally.

The 1984 elections were a turning point for Canada in many ways, but for the purposes of today's debate, Mr. Speaker, let me simply remind the House that the then Leader of the Official Opposition, the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, made his famous speech in Sept-Îles and said: As a Government, if we are elected, we shall make every effort to have Quebec join the Constitution and to bring about unity and reconciliation in the country.

At the same time, we had the sad spectacle of the Leader of the Opposition, who was then Prime Minister and newly chosen Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, campaigning in Quebec and denouncing those who had voted "yes" in the referendum, apparently because such people did not have or should not have the same rights as those who had voted "no",

and saying that such people should not be candidates in a general election and should perhaps not even vote.

Such was the argument used by the federal Liberals in 1984. Strangely enough, some of the federal Liberals rose today, some to speak for, and others to speak against the Meech Lake Accord. However, in no case has anyone said that he stood up for the interests of Quebec in 1984.

In any case perhaps it was not necessary because Quebecers did come to grips with the situation. They decided they would settle the issue themselves at the appropriate level. In 1984 they said: We will make a clean-up. They may not have understood, but we sure did and we will turf them out. We will vote for people who for once can appreciate the legitimate aspirations of Quebec, so today, as a result of all those efforts, we have the honour and privilege to be here in the House.

There have been major changes after the 1984 election. First, as Hon. Members may recall—and some may have forgotten—in the months after the 1984 election even the PQ Government led by Premier Lévesque presented a series of demands as being the minimum demands of Quebec before it would join the Canadian federation.

Then there was a government change and this time the Government of Mr. Bourassa came to us with five demands, at least five demands prior to endorsing the Canadian Constitution. First the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society and, second, a limit on federal spending powers. There was also more power or more influence for the Quebec Government with respect to the appointment of Supreme Court of Canada judges. An increased and more important power. And recognition of Quebec's real power concerning immigration. There was also the question of veto.

Mr. Speaker, I confess that at the time I think we were all surprised to see that Quebec had cut down the number—from 20-odd demands the first time under the PQ Government—to a minimum of five, and we felt that was evidence of courage and frankness on the part of the Quebec Government which was saying: Well, here is our position. We will not give ourselves too much leeway to negotiate. But if you are sincere, and we think you are, we too will be sincere, we will be frank, set our minimum demands and begin the negotiations.

Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, Canadians saw some spectacular about-turns. On the political scene, I think everybody was amused, but first we were quite puzzled to see the sudden reversals within two major political Opposition Parties in Canada.

• (1340)

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, the unusual sight of the Liberal Members from Quebec gathered for a convention, I think, in Saint-Hyacinthe with Serge Joyal, André Ouellet, Mr. Garneau all finally seeing the light after having rejected Quebecers for 20 years, suddenly feeling somewhat like a