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where provinces would eventually gain the power to be very selective over the origins of people they admit to the country.

Although there have been, certainly in the past, stains on the immigration policies and practices of the country, most notably right before and in the first years of the Second World War, by and large we have an excellent record. That was celebrated and recognized by the United Nations in the awarding of the Nansen Medal.

● (1540)

We want to keep that record and I believe we as Canadians want to build on that record, not by adopting a policy which will exclude large numbers of bona fide refugees. I saw a cartoon based, I believe, on Jacques Cartier's landing. People were being greeted by the Indians and one of the native people was looking over his shoulder saying "they lied to get in too". We do not want to see a refugee policy that rejects those who are legitimate refugees, and we do not want to see an immigration policy, nor does the Minister—if we are to believe the news reports—want to see an immigration policy that unduly restricts immigration into Canada. Let us remember that in, I believe, 1910 under the policies led by Sir Clifford Sifton Canada saw an influx of some 400,000 immigrants, some of whom today would qualify as refugees. This was a country then with a population of 7.5 million. I would challenge any Member or anyone anywhere to say that those people and their descendants did not integrate, participate and become fully part of Canadian society. Any notwithstanding clause that cuts off that sort of opportunity for the future would be something against which I feel we would have to speak out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Grisé (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to take part in today's debate on the Constitutional Accord, and I can only say that we as parliamentarians are indeed privileged to witness this turning point in Canadian history: one chapter is closed and a new chapter commences. We rejoice in Quebec's return to the Canadian constitutional family. We have formally drafted the principles of the Meech Lake Accord in terms agreeable to the eleven First Ministers. We can now proceed with the task of building the Canada of the next decade and the next century.

The constitutional question is undoubtedly the most oldest one in our federal-provincial relations. It is a complex, emotionally charged issue which encompasses so many divergent interests. It is a question that has shaped the last 100 years of our history and our society and that will shape our future. It is a question that has always spoken to the hearts and minds of Canadian politicians who realize the importance of what is at stake here. It is also a question we have given centre stage on our political platform, first of all because we intended to deal with a problem that goes back to 1927 and which was not satisfactorily dealt with in 1981.

In the historic speech given by our Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) at Sept-Îles during the last election campaign, it was on August 6, 1984, he made a commitment to conduct discussions with a view to bringing Quebec back to the Canadian constitutional family. We left nothing to chance, we

worked very hard and now we are reaping the benefits. Mr. Speaker, without wanting to make this a partisan debate, I must say that we have our Prime Minister to thank for this achievement.

I am proud and pleased that the Meech Lake Accord which in itself was a major achievement has been formally made into a constitutional agreement endorsed by all Parties. I am proud because the initiative which led to this outcome did avoid ambiguity and improvisation; because Quebec will join the constitutional family with honour and enthusiasm; because the democratically elected Quebec Government, with its openly federalist program, has expressed full satisfaction with the response to its demand; because nine other provinces as well expressed their satisfaction with this statement of principle of the equality of the provinces; because this new opening will eventually make it possible to launch discussions on other questions of general interest to all provinces, and of particular interest to some of them; because the 1987 Constitutional Accord is synonymous with national reconciliation, one of the major planks of our Prime Minister's election campaign; because, as a Quebecer and a Canadian I consider it is fair to and equitable for Quebec and Canada as a whole.

When the First Ministers met at Meech Lake it was the first time since the April, 1982, patriation of the Constitution that they got together to review the concerns which had prompted Quebec to refrain from participating fully in our country's constitutional evolution. Once again, Mr. Speaker, we are witnesses to the improved federal-provincial relations, particularly between Quebec and Ottawa, which have prevailed since our Government came into office.

Each of the five propositions of Premier Bourassa's Liberal Government was the object of serious considerations and of the April 30 agreement in principle. The 11 Governments were able to draft a constitutional amendment project which was endorsed on June 3.

Mr. Speaker, I should like to comment briefly on certain aspects of this project. First, the acknowledgement of Quebec's distinct society and the Canadian duality. In this House last October 3 the Prime Minister had this to say about Quebec, and I quote:

It is indeed a province with a difference! We have different roots, a different culture and the French language which is different . . . Thank goodness, it is a language which contributes to our Canadian identity.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, Quebec, a distinct society, enriches the very nature of Canada and gives it a unique character. As this century is drawing to a close, when as Canadian men and women we seek to establish a clearer definition of the values we share to confirm our common identity, by the same token we become aware that Canada's unity is closely linked to respect for its diversity.

Since the Canadian Constitution was patriated in 1982, most of our basic values and features that give Canada its essential identity have been recognized and protected by this country's supreme law. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom is an integral part of the Constitution. Of course the Charter mainly enshrines individual rights, but the Constitutional Act, 1982 also includes some collective rights.