

for various reasons with which one may agree or disagree, was not a party to the 1982 agreement.

We also know what happened in 1990 and what Quebec's reaction was at the time. The memory is still vivid. There was a very strong reaction. There is no reason why a negative response on October 26 would not trigger a reaction that would be at least as strong if not worse. A rejection of the agreement would, I believe, create a major political crisis in this country. I am not trying to dramatize the issue. However, the fact remains that the three major federal parties, through their leader in the House of Commons, are now committed to supporting this agreement.

The ten first ministers of the provinces are also committed, and the aboriginal leadership has done likewise. We can hardly expect that after this broad support, a rejection of this agreement would merely involve a return to the status quo. It would be unrealistic to think so. Obviously, no political party and no citizen of this country would stand to win anything by rejecting the agreement. We would all lose.

But if we consider for a moment the implications of a positive response, it seems to me that some of these implications are important enough to make us forget about the few doubts we may entertain about any part of the agreement.

And if, during the course of the campaign, it becomes evident that Canadians from other provinces are ready to vote yes massively, that can only have a positive effect on the campaign in Quebec which, from what it looks like now, will be rather difficult. If Quebecers feel that the vast majority of Canadians support the proposals before us, I am convinced that it will have an extremely positive effect on them.

If the agreement is accepted, not only will it mean that Canada is able to settle its own problems, but it will show the world, at this particularly difficult time in history, how we can reconcile different views on what a country must be, how we can create harmony between people of various ethnic origins, people who came here at different times and helped build our nation.

It seems to me that such an example could be very useful as we see countries like Czechoslovakia breaking up, others like Yugoslavia sinking into an absolutely horrendous civil war, and a whole series of countries of the former Soviet Union desperately seeking to settle their inter-ethnic problems.

What would be fantastic on the Canadian scene, if we succeed, is that we will have used a largely democratic process. This would clearly be an extremely important lesson for these countries which, in some cases, although they advocate democracy, have not yet really experienced it. It would also have a definitely positive impact on our economy and I, for one, am convinced that the effects would not be long to be felt and that we could at last devote a lot more of our time and energies to solving the very real problems we are facing.

[Senator Castonguay.]

As I said earlier, the people who would be tempted, for various reasons, to say "no" to this agreement should remember that the answers they did not get this time around could most probably come in the shape of legislation, other arrangements or agreements. I think they should also remember that it is important to believe in our capacity as Canadians to solve our problems peacefully.

Despite some fights and quarrels we had through the history of our 125-year-old country, which are natural since we are human, I think we ought to look to the future with confidence and to answer positively to the call of our political leaders. Thank you, honourable senators.

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Would the honourable senator entertain a question?

Senator Castonguay: Yes.

Senator Molgat: You mentioned the risks and the effects of a negative answer. Could you tell us what effect a positive answer outside Quebec and a negative one in Quebec would have? In your opinion, what would happen then?

Senator Castonguay: This is an issue I would rather address from Quebec's point of view. Of course, if Quebecers were to vote against this agreement, I think—and I am not in the best position to know—that the rest of Canada would react very negatively because I believe that a sincere effort was made by all concerned in the agreement before us to reach compromises that seem, if not always fully satisfactory, at least reasonable.

So, if I am right, this negative reaction would prevent further negotiations as well as a simple return to status quo. I fail to see how a government could start such a process all over.

It seems to me that Canadians from other provinces who are not concerned only with the Quebec issue may also want to move on and make headway on other aspects of this agreement. They could not wait forever for Quebec's OK.

Without speculating about various more or less negative scenarios, I think we can at least draw the conclusion that a simple return to status quo would be impossible, that we would go through very hard times and that, for those who support Quebec's independence, it would be a major step in that direction and almost an irreversible one.

Hon. Philippe Deane Gigantès: Honourable senators, I would like to congratulate Senator Castonguay and to praise him for not being a constitutional expert. Constitutional experts are lawyers and lawyers are trained to find the most minute flaw in any agreement and to keep hacking at it. We may have an exception here with Senator Beaudoin but other constitutional experts develop models, perfect visions of what a Constitution should be according to their constitutional studies. If an agreement, which cannot be anything but political, does not exactly reflect their ideas, they get mad and they criticize it.