

*Government Orders*

in 1763, which ceded French Canada to England. In 1791, the Quebec Act granted the right to speak French, practise the Catholic religion and use the Civil Code. The 1840 Act of Union united Upper Canada and Lower Canada, and in 1867, the British North America Act created Confederation.

Mr. Speaker, the Meech Lake Accord, to Francophones, was their eighth constitutional event, and following its demise, may be sure there will be a new eighth constitution for the people of Quebec, with or without Canada. The various constitutional crises we have known so far, Mr. Speaker, arose from the French Canadians' need to have their language and culture recognized and protected.

• (1250)

It would not be going too far to say that the very nature of Canada is determined by the fact that a francophone community and an anglophone community live side by side.

French Canada has always viewed the 1867 confederative pact as a pact between two peoples. This fact must be understood, Mr. Speaker, because it is still an important aspect of the on-going constitutional debate. Canada is a federal country, at the expressed request of French Canadians under the leadership of Georges Étienne Cartier, precisely so that they and the institutions that meet their needs may prosper in this land of America. Georges Étienne Cartier was successful in promoting his vision over the will of John A. Macdonald who wanted Canada to be a unitary state. Had Quebec not insisted there would have been no enduring constitutional debates throughout this century.

Chances are there would have been no amendments in 1982 had it not been for the rise of the independence movement in the Province of Quebec during the 1960s and 1970s. There would have been no Meech Lake had nobody felt the need to bring Quebec back into the constitutional fold. But then, Mr. Speaker, nor would we be confronted with an impending and serious crisis had the Prime Minister and his colleagues done their best to give all Canadians an enlightened explanation on the nature of the Meech Lake Accord. No, he chose instead to remain silent, Mr. Speaker. From the moment the accord was signed in 1987 until the very last minute he

buried his head in the sand and let people interpret the arrangement as they saw fit.

So when the situation really turned bad he resorted to blackmail and attempted to manipulate the various parties in the dying minutes. This explains why we are now in this serious predicament.

The Conservatives played the constitutional game like a bunch of amateurs without giving it every consideration it deserved, and now they are taking the same approach with the Spicer commission.

[*English*]

The reason for the failure of the Meech Lake Accord was that the Prime Minister and the government never went to the rest of Canada to explain the real meaning of the process. Frankly, it played the constitutional game in an amateurish way and it is in the process of doing the same thing again. The Prime Minister said: "I rolled the dice." The Prime Minister said in *The Globe and Mail* that he created the constitutional crisis so he could force the parties to the table.

I fear that with the Spicer commission and with the parliamentary committee the Prime Minister is about to play constitutional roulette once again with the people of Canada. He is doing that because, instead of having a thoughtful, planned process of open constitutional reform, for five months after the death of Meech he did nothing. Then, he launched the Spicer commission which has been roundly criticized on all sides and which does not even have a full complement of full-time working members.

The constitutional clock for this country is ticking and we have a Prime Minister who is using amateurish approaches to try to solve a very difficult problem. Contrast that with the approach taken by the Bélanger-Campeau Commission.

[*Translation*]

Whether we like it or not, the first challenge will come from Quebec. All political, social and economic actors are now seriously considering Quebec's political and constitutional future, an exercise which is not being done in this House, Mr. Speaker. The opposing teams stand face to face. Experts one after another express their views. Every day the newspapers are full of briefs and comments of every description. People are following the debate very closely. And what is heard is beyond the