

subject for coming negotiations. With the assurance of his fellow first ministers who met for a week, his legislature unanimously endorsed the Accord. We thank him.

● (1900)

A special tribute must be paid to John Turner, the outgoing leader of the Liberal Party, whose support for the accord never wavered and who had the courage to re-affirm his convictions before the recent Liberal leadership convention. Ed Broadbent as well, notwithstanding a few minor hesitations, correctly honoured his commitment and deserves our gratitude.

Finally, the initiative for this gripping and painful adventure of national reconciliation was the work of our Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Quebecers must not forget that he was the author, advocate and unrelenting defender of this accord whose sole aim, from start to finish, was to bring Quebec back into the Canadian constitutional fold. Despite the deep disappointment he must be feeling, it would be unfair and malicious to hold him responsible for this failure. Many of the comments I heard this afternoon led me to believe that he was the preferred target of our friends opposite. During three years the Prime Minister and the members of his team, particularly our leader, Senator Murray, worked patiently, relentlessly and loyally to convince the new provincial premiers elected during that period that they ought to honour and ratify the signature of their predecessors.

A very special acknowledgement concerning the impeccable behaviour of Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa who, in his televised address, thanked Prime Minister Mulroney for his unfailing support. With firmness, dignity but with moderation, he described the frustration felt by his government and the people of Quebec, yet never did he dismiss his federalist option. I believe this last sentence is significant.

We hope his appeal will be heard and understood. For sure, he will never negotiate a new accord as long as Canada as a whole does not accept the minimum five demands which two recalcitrant provincial legislatures chose not to honour. The ball is definitely in Canada's court, and I hope that the message of Mr. Bourassa, who has the stature of a respected and respectable head of State, will finally be analysed on its merits. Otherwise, the march of Quebecers which we witnessed in Montreal yesterday and which you saw on your television screens will continue inexorably towards their affirmation as a distinct society.

During the past few weeks I was reminded of my professional life as a physician. Many times we tried to save patients but were unable to do so. Medicine's failures, however, have been responsible for some of the remarkable progress we have made today. Using this as a metaphor for Meech Lake, it seems to me that the death of Meech Lake may become a starting point for correcting some of the serious shortcomings in our constitutional system. Society, like medicine, must analyze its mistakes and find new ways to avoid repeating them. Since perfection is not inherent to the human condition, society or legislators, we can only strive towards an ideal that is rarely achieved, and we must do so in gradual stages.

The failure of Meech Lake should be seen as one of those stages, and that is why, despite its imperfections, I personally endorse this proposal with enthusiasm, confidence and pride. I remain convinced that its rejection was a serious mistake, and I fervently hope that the consequences will not be irreparable.

I believe that if Canada is to be one of the leading nations of this world, it must show leadership in taking a more understanding attitude to its own minorities. To promote respect, good will and understanding is as much a matter of the heart as the mind. The post-Meech period demands that we review our entire Constitution, not this inconsistent and often ill-conceived «patching» whose interpretation may vary from one expert to the next. It is my humble opinion that perhaps the time has come to create a kind of royal commission whose mandate would be to draft a second constitution adapted to the needs of a modern Canada. The Commission would have a five-year mandate, which would be time well spent to take some distance and to organize wide-ranging hearings with witnesses from across the country, from all the provinces, and produce a document that is realistic and acceptable to the people of this country.

For the time being we must set aside all prejudices and, especially, our partisan feelings to draw a lesson from Meech and rebuild an exemplary country based on co-operation, not confrontation. It is a possibility, if we agree that our linguistic and cultural differences can become a stimulus for collective and distinctive enrichment.

In concluding, honourable senators, I ask you to understand the tremendous disappointment of the people of Quebec, to work hard to reconcile our differences, and to support the generous and comprehensive historical aspirations of Quebec, which are entirely compatible with the equally specific aspirations of other provinces and territories and Canada as a whole.

Honourable senators, by my remarks I have tried to transmit to you my disappointment, my feelings, my convictions and, yes, my optimism. Thank you.

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat: Would Senator David entertain a question?

Senator David: Of course, Senator Molgat.

Senator Molgat: Did I understand correctly that at the beginning of his speech he said that two provinces had rejected the Meech Lake Accord?

Senator David: I don't know whether I said it in exactly those words, but in any case, two provinces, Manitoba and Newfoundland, did not sign the Accord.

Senator Molgat: I thought you said: "Rejected". That was certainly not the case in Manitoba. The question was never put.

Senator David: I agree that as far as that term is concerned, you are right, Senator Molgat. I should have used the word "ratified". I should have said they did not ratify the document.