

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

My constituents cannot accept this, nor can I. When the time comes I will vote in accordance with my conscience and their wishes. I, Sir, will not desert them. I will vote against the resolution that we have before us.

Even the Government, which is advancing this resolution, knows in its heart that it is wrong. Let us consider the words of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) when he introduced the resolution for debate on September 29. He said:

To impose constitutional reform on any province and its citizens is to deny their rightful participation in Confederation—

That is precisely what has happened to the people of the North. This imposition has been made on them. He continued:

—and runs contrary to the spirit and history of constitutional development in this country.

Again, that is what has happened in northern Canada. We have had a process of constitution-making in Canada where things have been done generally by consent. This has not been the case at Meech Lake. He also said:

Canada is a partnership of its peoples and provinces, a partnership which can be willingly embraced but not imposed.

The people of the North were not there. They were not even asked. Their opinion was not considered. Again we have that imposition on 75,000 people who want to be Canadians the same as the remaining 25 million. He went on to say:

This concept is understood and accepted by Canadians from coast to coast.

It is quite apparent that that concept was not understood and was not accepted by the 11 gentlemen who gathered at Meech Lake.

What are the objections of northern Canadians to the Meech Lake agreement? These have been listed and debated many times. I have spoken on this subject in the House, so I will just give a brief synopsis now. First, it was total exclusion from the process despite repeated requests to the contrary. Everything was done behind our backs. We were unable to protect our rights that were bartered away at Meech Lake. We were treated as expendable pawns in the constitution game.

As objectionable as this might be, if the results had been good, fair, and reasonable, we could have put it behind us and gone on from there. However, that was not to be the case.

Let us look at what we in the North have lost at Meech Lake. Before, we had the same rights with respect to immigration as any other province in Canada. Now we find that we are in an inferior position, although immigration in the Territories is as important as it is anywhere else, probably even more so because of the small existing population base which could easily be swamped by a large wave of immigration.

• (1130)

Before, our Senators were appointed exactly, precisely, as provincial Senators. Now this also is not to be the case. The very wording of the resolution is ambiguous on this point, yet the Government will not even accept a small technical

amendment clarifying whether or not Senators in the North can be appointed by the system currently existing. It is crazy to say that Territorial Senators can be appointed only on the recommendation of a province somewhere else. Why is it that that small technical amendment cannot be accepted?

Everyone in the Territories has been denied the right ever to become a judge of the Supreme Court of Canada. Again, we have lost ground. Prior to Meech Lake, a member of the Territorial Bar Association, a member of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories could aspire to be seated on the bench of the Supreme Court of Canada. That is now denied us and it is, I understand, one of the points in a lawsuit that has been brought about by the Government of the Northwest Territories. A similar lawsuit has been brought forward by the Government of the Yukon.

With respect to the creation of new provinces, something that is dear to our hearts, prior to the changes in 1982 the creation of a new province was solely a matter between the Government of Canada and the territory or colony involved. That is how Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland came into Canada. In 1982 the process was changed. At Meech Lake it was changed to make it much more difficult for a territory to ever become a province. Any province in Canada has the right of veto over whether the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, a part or parts thereof should fully enter Confederation. Every province has been given a veto over that, and that, Sir, is wrong. It is not in keeping with the constitutional history of Canada, not one little bit.

I have heard of someone whose birthright was sold for a mess of pottage. What we have here is our birthright being sold for a kettle of fish or whatever else might be on the agenda of the First Ministers' meeting.

I would like to compliment the Members and Senators who served on the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on the 1987 Constitutional Accord. They listened carefully and sympathetically to the representations made by northerners who appeared before them. It was too much to expect that they would recommend in their report the necessary amendments to the resolution. I do not think that we expected them to do that because the law had been laid down in advance. But they were kind enough to point out the errors that had been made and the necessity that these items to which I have referred previously be placed on an early agenda for meetings of the First Ministers pursuant to the Meech Lake Accord to discuss constitutional matters further.

Apparently we have lost this first battle, we have lost the Meech Lake battle. But we have not lost the war, not by a long shot. The battle will continue until northern Canadians are treated the same as southern Canadians. By working hard now, and hopefully with the support of Members of this House and provincial legislatures across the country, we must make sure the necessary changes are placed on the agenda of the first First Ministers' meeting to be held on the Constitution. It