

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

not so petty, political differences to ensure that a thorough hearing was conducted and an excellent set of recommendations was provided.

I must say it was with a somewhat heavy heart that I listened to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) make his opening speech on behalf of the Government. Essentially, he ignored the thoughtful recommendations put forward by the joint committee. He gave us the impression that perhaps he had not even read the text of the very thoughtful committee report. That was a bit disappointing. The first speaker for the Government failed to react to the recommendations. Perhaps we can look forward to the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) when he makes his speech to indicate just what action the Government plans to take in terms of those thoughtful recommendations.

I believe that when one sees something that results in a consensus on behalf of the three political Parties and the fact that the 10 Premiers unanimously agreed to the Meech Lake Accord, that really says something. While we all have concerns about what it does not include, or what it did not include, or what it overlooked, and perhaps even some flaws within the existing Constitution, that is the reality. This is not a perfect document. I do not think constitutions are ever perfect documents. They are fluid documents, ongoing documents. They are alive and everchanging.

I think that what we must do now is to identify those areas within the Accord and the Constitution that are still lacking and that require further work in the future. Of course, that is the primary reason why we put forward some amendments. We did so in the hope that the Government would accept them and include them. But if that does not take place, if the Government decides not to do that, it should at least see these areas of amendment as flags for the First Ministers to consider at the earliest opportunity.

Again, some have indicated that the process could have been better. Indeed, it could have been. But I think we are now in a position where we must make the best of it, which is what we are attempting to do.

It is important that we see the Meech Lake Accord as not the final decision, that there will be other opportunities. This is only the second opportunity we have really had to consider the Constitution of Canada. I think that what has been accomplished here will be recognized by historians as providing a major building block in the building of our Constitution.

You will recall, Madam Speaker, in 1982 when we finally agreed, at that time there was a major flaw in the agreement. There was a major gap in the agreement. Quebec did not sign it. Here was a fundamental part of the Canadian family not part of the constitutional signatures that went on to the final document. That has now changed. Quebec has now indicated that it is willing and prepared, and perhaps even enthusiastic, to become part of the Canadian family, both constitutionally as well as politically. I suppose as an ongoing result it will also be emotionally and psychologically.

I must say that when I look through the debates, and while I was not there physically on that particular day, I think one of the most moving witnesses was Madame Solange Chaput-Rolland. She said the following about the Meech Lake Accord:

I think none outside Quebec knew the reality of the referendum. I travelled throughout Canada, about a few months after. It was all over, eh? Good. It was not exactly all over. Families against families, towns against towns, fathers and mothers not speaking to their children.

(During the Referendum) we spoke with thousands of Quebecers. Women wanted to leave their children a country as big as the one they had received from their father. That was mainly the article that reached the heart, because you are right: In this country if we put a little more heart into what we are doing, maybe we would be aware of the hurt we inflict on others.

And then we came home. We went back to the National Assembly, back to our villages, back to our houses, back to the friends that were no more friends; they were on the "yes" and we were on the "no". It was not a picnic, it was not a social gathering, it was not a think-tank, it was a battle between brothers, a dangerous, divisive battle, and we still feel it. It was not 100 years ago, it was seven years ago that we lived that referendum.

English Canada could not care less one month after, and it stung me and it stung all of us who fought so hard to remain in Canada and to find ourselves outside of Canada. You know, it was a very dramatic gesture when Mr. Levesque put the flag of Quebec at half-mast on the day you were all celebrating here.

But our hearts were at half-mast too that day, because we were out of a country we had chosen to remain.

So the Accord of Meech Lake brought us something *incroyable* as a gesture of friendship—

And I would really like people to know that for us Quebecers, as for all the others here and everyone else, the Meech Lake accords are not an end, but the beginning of a grand process, I think. But I must tell you that for me it is really the first time that I have felt, YES, I won that referendum.

But surely by now, surely, you all know that if Meech is to fail for whatever reason, there can be no more negotiations, no more justifications.

If Quebec is once again to realize that it is more difficult to opt in Canada than to stay out of Canada, then surely, you know that the roads of tomorrow can only lead to another form of independence, but this time not chosen by any political party in Quebec, maybe chosen and imposed on Quebec outside Quebec.

This testimony was very moving. It explains the situation that existed during the period of the referendum. At that time, as we all recall, on May 20, 1980, the people of Quebec, as others have said, said "yes" to Canada. We now have the opportunity to say "yes" to Quebec.

● (1550)

On May 22, 1980, two days after the referendum, the New Democratic Party placed the following motion before the House of Commons:

That this House welcomes the result of the referendum in Quebec and pledges itself to interpret that vote as a clear call for constitutional change.

In my estimation, the Meech Lake Accord provides an opportunity for that constitutional change that was promised back in 1980.

We welcome Quebec's return to the constitutional family. Since its very beginning, our Party has always recognized Quebec as a distinct society. We have always recognized and acknowledged the linguistic duality of Canada, and the fact