

[English]

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, I know my friend, Jean Lapierre, knows how much I bled in the Liberal caucus over the issue of Meech Lake. I want to tell him, and through him to Quebecers, and through them to Canadians, that the people outside Quebec who rejected Meech Lake did not want to reject the people of Quebec. For the Conservative Party of Brian Mulroney, who for three years travelled into the province of Quebec telling Quebecers, "A vote against Meech is a vote against you", and for the members of the Bloc Quebecois, who want to facilitate the separation of Quebec from Canada by telling Quebecers, "The rest of Canada does not care", I say to them, you are wrong. The rest of Canada wants to make a home for Quebec within the Canadian family. If we do not, if we fail in this initiative, and I dare say with the proposal of the government we are heading for failure, it is not only the federal Parliament of Canada that will pay the price but it is the country of Canada.

To have a Canada without Quebec, to have a Canada without one of the founding people who have contributed economically, socially, culturally, linguistically to the very fabric of our nation, that is to have no Canada at all. Perhaps there are a lot of Canadians with blinders on. I believe some of those Canadians were in my own party and I said so. However, the time has come to take those blinders off and recognize that not only do we have a country that is worth saving, we have a very special part of that country, indeed, a unique and distinct part of that country, known as Quebec, which must be made to feel at home again in the Canadian family.

How many Quebecers looked at the rejection of Meech as Canada's last chance to say no to Quebec? We have had another chance. Unfortunately, with the federal process which is being launched, not only by this particular committee but by the Spicer Commission, we are frittering away precious time in which the future of our country hangs in the balance.

[Translation]

After refusing to testify before the Commission on the political and constitutional future of Quebec, the Prime Minister actually believes that his initiatives here in Parliament will help Canadians meet the constitutional challenge. After refusing to recognize the main constitutional problem we must deal with in the near future, the

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Prime Minister thinks he is proposing adequate solutions. He does not understand the problem, and he is proposing the wrong solutions. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, how can solutions be effective if the problem is ill-defined?

On November 30, I asked the Deputy Prime Minister whether the Prime Minister was going to appear publicly before the Bélanger-Campeau Commission. We already know he made several statements behind closed doors and we also know that the closed door process no longer works. Mr. Speaker, you will recall that the Deputy Prime Minister answered no, saying that he failed to see why the Prime Minister should appear before the various commissions involved in studies and inquiries on the future of Canada. For shame, Mr. Speaker! The Prime Minister himself will not appear before the Bélanger-Campeau Commission on the future of Quebec! With or without the Prime Minister of Canada, Quebec's self-determination will have a major impact on Canada's self-determination. If Quebec decides to go its own way at the end of March, Canadians will lose a great deal, Mr. Speaker. Canadians outside Quebec have the most to lose if the Prime Minister is not prepared to speak for a united Canada before the Bélanger-Campeau Commission.

I believe the Prime Minister should acknowledge that national unity is his responsibility. Let's not fool ourselves, Mr. Speaker. Whether we like it or not, by reflecting on its own political and constitutional future, Quebec is actually determining Canada's future. With all due respect for the other provinces, I think we must admit that Quebec and Quebecers are the best informed on constitutional matters. It is not the first time they are dealing with these questions. We could even say the Constitution is a national sport in Quebec, and as with hockey, there are a number of well-trained teams, expert coaches, commentators who are well-informed and a very partisan, well-informed and knowledgeable public. The French in the St. Lawrence valley are past masters in the constitutional arts, and they also have the most experience in this field.

The 1982 Constitution is the seventh political or constitutional regime the French in Canada have known. The French regime, which started with the founding of Quebec in 1608, was followed by the British occupation after the Conquest in 1759, and then the Treaty of Paris