

Constitution Amendment, 1987

(a) the recognition that the existence of French-speaking Canadians, centred in Quebec but also present elsewhere in Canada, and English-speaking Canadians, concentrated outside Quebec but also present in Quebec, constitutes a fundamental characteristic of Canada;

(b) the recognition that Quebec constitutes within Canada a distinct society;

(c) the recognition that aboriginal peoples constitute a distinctive and fundamental characteristic of Canada;

(d) the recognition of the multicultural nature of Canadian society, and in particular respect for the many origins, creeds and cultures as well as the differing regional identities that helped shape Canadian society; and

(e) the recognition of the advantages of developing the Canadian economic union."

I submit this amendment in both French and English. It is seconded by the Hon. Member for York Centre, on his behalf and on behalf of the Hon. Member for Papineau.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: I want to thank the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) for his comments and the filing of the motion as has been read and presented to the Chair in both official languages. As is my obligation to Hon. Members, I will consider the motion carefully and report back to the Chamber with respect to its procedural acceptability. In the meantime, we will continue with debate. I thank the right hon. gentleman.

Ms. Pauline Jewett (New Westminster—Coquitlam): It is a great honour for me today to be the lead-off speaker for the New Democratic Party on the Constitutional Accord. I may say that throughout the summer, during the hearings, I have taken a great interest in the Accord and what it accomplishes, which is really tremendous. I have also taken a great interest in some of its shortcomings and some of the future directions for constitutional change and renewal. In that connection, I may say that all of us in Canada have realized during the course of debate this summer that the Constitution should belong to the people of Canada and that the people of Canada should be heard when it comes to constitutional renewal and reform.

Partly because of our lack of experience in constitutional change since the 1982 patriation and Charter, and partly because of the haste of the Government, we have not had as much openness and consultation with the Canadian public as we would have liked. There is a lesson in this for us all and I will return in a moment to the process.

On behalf of the New Democratic Party, I want to say how very much we welcome Quebec's return to the Constitutional family.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jewett: We have always felt it was a grievous occasion in 1982 when Quebec was isolated from patriation and the Charter. As a political Party we have wanted ever since to see this isolation ended. When the Quebec Government suggested a couple of years ago its five proposals which would make possible the ending of this isolation we heralded them. We agreed with them.

● (1240)

Since our founding as a political Party we have known that Quebec is indeed a distinct society. We have known of the linguistic duality of Canada, and that these are key and vital characteristics of our nation.

We felt that after Quebec had basically said yes to Canada in the referendum that we should do everything possible, compatible with the interests, concerns and ideals of all Canadians, to say yes to Quebec. I remember very vividly Ministers of the Parti Québécois Government coming to western Canada, in particular to British Columbia, and discovering, often to their surprise they said, how much we in British Columbia wanted Quebec in Canada, how much Quebec being a part of the constitutional family meant to us as British Columbians, and how wrong it would be for this nation to go into the future with one of its very basic elements not part of it. It was in British Columbia that I heard the strongest pleas for Quebec to come in, to be in, and for the rest of us to help make that possible.

We feel very badly when we are told that the Constitutional Accord pays some kind of favour to Quebec. I was quite shocked, as some Members of the House will recall, when former Prime Minister Trudeau was before the committee and suggested that all we were doing in this Accord was caving in to something "Quebec wanted" and the rest of us did not want. For we New Democrats, and I speak on behalf of all Canadians on this matter, we are delighted. We feel that the Accord is what we want. We feel that it is good for us, that it is good for all of Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jewett: Not only does the Accord have the result of reuniting Canada, but it does so in a spirit of what we have always called "co-operative federalism", both in the reaching of the Accord and in its provisions. The Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Turner) said a moment ago that Liberal Members could not sign the report of the Special Joint Committee because they did not like some of the language of the document. In particular, they did not like the reference to confrontation and conflict having characterized much of Canada's federal-provincial relations in the years up to 1984. There was confrontation and conflict. There was a tendency—a very strong tendency—to want to tell provinces what to do rather than to seek accommodations with them, in sharp contrast to the 1960s when a strong era of co-operative federalism prevailed.

We think that there cannot be a nation as large, as complex, as dispersed at this country without having a genuine federal system. Within such a federal system there must always be a very high degree of negotiation, discussion, and compromise, in order to reach the national objectives that we want. We think that the Accord gives expression to this vision of the operation