

*Oral Questions*

no connection whatsoever between Meech Lake and his decision as Premier of the Province of Quebec.

But I would like to ask the Prime Minister a simple question: considering that the Premier of Quebec might change is policy, has the Prime Minister decided to have an early meeting with the Premier of Quebec and the other Premiers to continue the Process of constitutional change and, at the same time, solve certain fundamental problems?

**The Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I think I answered yesterday to my friend that I wrote to the Premier on October 7 to set up a First Ministers' conference during the first quarter of 1989. No doubt constitutional matters will be discussed at that meeting.

But the problem remains intact, to use the phrase of my predecessor on the matter of the Constitution. He himself in his book judged the 1981—1982 Constitution very severely. The major flaw was Quebec's absence. They did not succeed to bring Quebec back into the Canadian constitutional mainstream, even with the "notwithstanding clause".

So, here is a challenge for us all to try and find a formula that would allow an honorable and enthusiastic return of Quebec into the Canadian family—then we will be in a position to proceed with the other important decisions such as Senate reform, justice for our native peoples, and all the other major questions that await us. But we can do nothing unless we can find a formula that will allow Quebec to come back honourably into the Canadian Constitution.

[English]

REQUEST THAT FIRST MINISTERS' MEETING BE  
CONVENED

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I have a series of questions for the Prime Minister. Yesterday the Prime Minister criticized the Premier of Manitoba for linking the question of Meech Lake to the Language Bill in Quebec. The Prime Minister today in Question Period has just made that linkage himself.

**Mr. Valcourt:** That is stupid.

**Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre):** The fact is he just did.

Second, the Prime Minister has not indicated what his reaction would be to the calls by the Premier of New Brunswick, the Premier of Ontario, who have asked for

an immediate First Ministers' meeting to consider the notwithstanding clause and to consider the question of how we can provide a national protection for minority rights.

Will the Prime Minister now agree that a First Ministers' meeting would be immediately called in the new year and that specifically on the agenda would be the question of how the notwithstanding clause could be a matter of agreement among all the provinces and the federal Government to eliminate it from the Constitution in order to ensure the full protection of minority rights?

• (1440)

Why was that not part of the Meech Lake consideration? Is the Prime Minister now prepared to reconsider his position and put it on the table so that we can eliminate the precedent that was established a few days ago?

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, there are two serious misstatements of fact in the prefatory remarks of my hon. friend. He stated that Premier McKenna asked for an immediate First Ministers' Conference. He did no such thing; he said the contrary. He said that a First Ministers' Conference would be premature.

The Hon. Member then indicated that I made a linkage between Meech Lake and the utilization of the right.

**Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre):** Yes, I did.

**Mr. Mulroney:** I said no such thing. I said that Premier Bourassa in his response in a press conference appeared to indicate that he could forgo perhaps ultimately the utilization of the notwithstanding clause, if the protections for Quebec and the other minorities were there pursuant to the adoption of the Meech Lake Accord. It was not at all what I said. I made no such linkage whatsoever.

**An Hon. Member:** Do you disagree with them?

**Mr. Mulroney:** I made no such linkage at all because there is no linkage between the Meech Lake Accord itself and what has transpired in the Province of Québec. The Meech Lake Accord provides for greater protection, and greater justice, and greater equality for English and French-speaking minorities across Canada, and surely all Members of the House must be in favour of that.