

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

● (1700)

Gordon Robertson, the federal Government's top constitutional adviser from 1975 to 1979, reminded us in committee that the first goal of the constitutional reform process from the start was, in his words, to produce a sense of satisfaction and acceptance in Quebec. Through the Accord this goal has been won at last. I would like to quote briefly from Mr. Robertson's testimony shown at page 29 of the committee report. It says:

Members of the Joint Committee were particularly impressed with the approach formulated by Gordon Robertson, former Clerk of the Privy Council and a participant in almost every important federal-provincial conference on constitutional matters from 1950 until his retirement from the federal public service in 1979.

Mr. Robertson advocated a three-step approach.

These are his words now:

As I see it, the basic question is what are the prime objectives of policy to be achieved at this time, 1987, in the constitutional realm? The (federal) government has decided, and I think the other governments, the provincial governments agree, that the prime objective is to achieve an agreement under which Quebec can become a willing participant in the Canadian Confederation. This seems to me to be right as to the prime objective of policy at this time. If that is agreed, the second question I think is whether the arrangements to achieve that objective involve consequences that are seriously adverse for Canada.

Then the third question, it seems to me, is whether there is a reasonable prospect of getting better arrangements than the arrangements that are incorporated in the *Constitutional Accord, 1987*.

Mr. Robertson went on in his testimony to answer both those latter questions in the negative.

Really, I think there are two opposing visions of Canada challenging us in this debate and that challenged us as members of the joint committee over the long hot summer days when we sat in the Railway Committee Room. One is a vision of confrontation, the other a vision of co-operation. One is founded on struggle and animosity between federal and provincial Governments, the other on co-operation and mutual respect. One sees the federal and provincial Governments as rivals for the allegiance of Canadians, the other as partners in serving Canadians.

The Constitutional Accord of 1987 stands squarely for the vision of co-operation, mutual respect, and partnership. I believe this vision of co-operation and partnership is shared by most Canadians.

I believe as well that most Canadians want us to adopt the Accord because it translates this vision into the building blocks of a stronger and more united Canada. How does it do that? That is a question I intend to answer in the next few minutes of my remarks.

The Constitutional Accord of 1987 is rooted in the spirit of federalism and the principle that the federal and provincial Governments share responsibility for the well-being of Canada. That spirit was brutally ruptured during the events leading to patriation of the Constitution. In 1980 Quebecers said *non* to sovereignty association and *oui* to the renewed federalism they were solemnly promised by the rest of us, in

particular the Right Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, during the referendum campaign. Yet when the final deal was made it was without Quebec's consent, without the participation of the people who had opted for Canada in the belief that their culture and their presence would be respected.

We heard clear testimony in committee on the threat this situation posed to our continuing unity. "It left a wound and a grievance", in the words of Jack Pickersgill, a man who draws on a wealth of experience in constitutional and political matters going back to the time of Mackenzie King. Gordon Robertson sounded a clear warning that it would be "an extremely dangerous situation for the future if we leave it one in which perhaps there is a sense of grievance, frustration, perhaps even of betrayal" in Quebec.

This Accord now gives us an opportunity to heal the wounds and make us one Canada again. I think it was perhaps put best, certainly most emotionally, by Solange Chaput-Rolland, former member of the P  pin-Robarts committee and Liberal Member of the Quebec Legislature when she told the committee:

[*Translation*]

It was only on the day following the Meech Lake Accord that I really felt for the first time that we had won the referendum.

[*English*]

Those are the words of a woman who cherishes and respects her country, who stood for her country when it was not easy to do so, and who now rejoices in the respect her country has paid, with this Accord, to her culture.

However, the Accord does much more than bring Quebec back into our constitutional family. I would support it even if it had nothing to do with ending Quebec's isolation since it promotes my view of Canada by creating a framework for heightened co-operation between two orders of Government.

I will not take up the time of the House describing these provisions of the Accord in detail, they are well-known and have been mentioned by other participants in this debate. However, I think it is useful to sketch some of the implications to make my point clear.

Let me begin with key federal institutions. By offering the provinces an opportunity to have a say in appointments, the Accord strengthens the Supreme Court of Canada, and the other place, the Senate, as truly federal institutions. In the case of the other place, the Accord moves forward the process of further reform in the second round of constitutional talks.

I do not suppose anyone doubts that the goal is to strengthen regional voices in our national decision-making process. Certainly that is the starting point. The interim procedures set out in the Accord represent an important gesture of good faith. Let me point out that this aspect of the Accord is in the spirit of 1867 when the Fathers of Confederation envisaged the second Chamber as a forum for regional concerns at the centre. As to the Supreme Court, its federal character can only be reinforced by provincial participation in the choice of