

*The Constitution*

with them, and I think of those who work on the same objectives, but in the Province of Quebec. God knows how difficult and painful the exchanges have been over the years between those two political worlds. However, the concept of a united Canada was on its way. But for that concept to become a reality, there had to be a gradual recognition of the possibility for Canada to become a modern country at long last, to become a full-fledged economic, political and cultural entity.

A former Premier of Quebec, Jean Lesage, said: Adapting to one's environment is a basic law of life, it is a necessity for any living organism, and that goes for institutions as well as individuals. To live on, the Canadian Confederation must develop, and to develop, it must be able to reconcile the conditions of a specific point in history with its underlying principles and unswerving spirit.

Mr. Speaker, most of the position of Quebec with respect to Canadian federalism has been repeated consistently and unanimously by almost every premier of that province.

Mr. Speaker, the right to be ourselves, to ensure the permanence of our roots and institutions, to achieve individual and collective self-fulfillment, this right which we see as fundamental through the centuries and through all those men and women who shaped our history, this right is not a passing whim, but the noble and sound reality of Quebec nationalism, a nationalism, Mr. Speaker, which in our province is passed on from generation to generation and which is not, as some people might believe, the offshoot of passing idealisms. This nationalism has never failed even though it has expressed itself in different ways in different eras. This same nationalism, which has made us different from others within a same country, is now reflected in a positive way by this constitutional agreement which recognizes Quebec as a distinct society.

Today we know that when the Prime Minister spoke to the people of this country and the people of Quebec, particularly in terms of national reconciliation, he was thinking of the adhesion of Quebecers to a workable project.

We know also that the Prime Minister was speaking the truth when he expressed his will to have Quebec join the Constitution, and that he will be remembered in our history; beyond partisanship, beyond good and bad times, beyond words, we have to recognize in this man the immense understanding he has always shown in his own cultural duality for the distinct reality of Quebec, and his deep commitment to it.

I have personally worked for this agreement, this historic agreement, since I belong to a generation which was always there when things were changing. In the course of this extraordinary development, I have managed to define my nationalism, my deep and vital sense of belonging to Quebec. But I have also felt with the same intensity that all my action was aimed at an opening onto "another homeland".

[*English*]

I have also seen an extraordinary thing happen, and I think all Canadians are aware of it. Over the many years of constitutional equivocation, we often saw the Province of Quebec

claiming its role within Confederation and asserting what it maintained were fundamental rights. Quebec spoke of a division of power, of increased powers over immigration, of opting out, and of its own identity.

I am proud to say today that the intense reflection of Quebecers over all those years resulted in an openness from which all the provinces are now benefiting. That is the true spirit of this Confederation. That is the initiative which the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) saw as necessary in order to lead the country toward what I referred to earlier as modernity.

[*Translation*]

At Meech Lake, for the first time in Canadian history, the 11 First Ministers reached an agreement that must now be officially worded and signed.

We must not disappoint Canadians, we must make this a matter of honour. And I say, in a strong, unequivocal voice—Quebec's concurrence to the Constitution is possible.

We saw those First Ministers leave Meech Lake with the conviction it was possible. We heard them, back into their provinces, report to the people on an agreement in principle that meets their vision of the country and their genuine aspirations.

It is important that I should put this new agreement into the perspective of a Department of special concern to me—Immigration.

There is in that area an opening warranted by representations and projects, that will enable new Canadians to find substance for their material, and cultural needs. And there is above all an opening under which Quebec can ensure the new Canadians it is receiving can adapt rapidly to the language and culture patterns of French-speaking Quebecers, without thereby losing their own.

● (1610)

[*English*]

The various communities that live in this country make such a contribution that we must take the necessary steps to guarantee all of them full and complete well-being and development. As you are aware, Canada has a reputation as a generous country that welcomes immigrants. In order to continue this course we must unite our efforts so that nothing is spared in providing a welcome characterized by fairness and sharing. The respect for ethnic groups lies at the very heart of the vitality and dynamism of a country such as ours. To have a sense of this remarkable wealth, of these remarkable riches that come to us from elsewhere and that contribute so tangibly to our personal and collective development is to have at the same time a renewed and reassuring awareness of one's own nationalism.

[*Translation*]

My experience with the various communities, when I was at the Department of the Secretary of State, led me to a major