

Constitution Amendment, 1987

The Constitution is to be interpreted in this light. How is it possible for the document to recognize duality as constituting a fundamental characteristic of Canada on the one hand, while on the other, as found by the joint committee, permitting the erosion of the rights of English-speaking Quebecers? It is totally illogical. If this is not an egregious error, then perhaps the word is devoid of meaning and should be stricken from the Canadian vocabulary. One could also conclude, however, that perhaps it was intended. If that is the case, it is unacceptable to me.

If the proposed Section 2(1)(a) does not have the meaning the Government tells us it has, that it does not really stand for the equality of our two official languages and the right of English and French-speaking Canadians to feel fully at home and secure across Canada, then that, too, is unacceptable.

There are those who have attempted to stifle debate by branding all those who question the Accord as being anti-Quebec. I resent this tactic. I am a Quebecer as much as any other person who lives in my province. I have fought for my province and my country. The linguistic community of which I am a member is as integral to our province, its social, cultural and economic fabric, and well-being, as any other individual or community.

It may not be popular these days to speak to the concerns of my English-speaking community, but when dealing with the Constitution and individual rights it is principal which must take precedence. It seems many are unaware of the evolution of my province. They still believe English-speaking Quebecers are a privileged and pampered minority whose rights may be sacrificed on the altar of so-called political imperatives. Is this the spirit of Meech Lake?

The past is past. Let us deal with the future. It is time this myth was put behind us. You must understand that English-speaking Quebecers are in rapid decline. It is inconceivable to me that in my province, my language, one of Canada's two official languages, is prohibited for use on public signs even when accompanied by the French equivalent. In a country that prides itself on multiculturalism, the use of languages other than the two official languages is also prohibited, with few exceptions. It is totally inconsistent and unacceptable to entrench linguistic duality and at the same time to permit the erosion of rights of the official language minorities in Quebec.

• (1530)

There are those who have argued that Quebec should be as French as Ontario is English. Look at the facts. Ontario is becoming increasingly bilingual in its courts, legislators, school system, government and health services. This is no time to consider the possibility of erosion of minority language rights in Quebec. Furthermore, if our goal is the achievement of linguistic equality throughout Canada, let there be no misunderstanding—the erosion of minority language rights in Quebec will do nothing to advance French language outside

Quebec. On the contrary, it will undermine the efforts to improve linguistic rights outside of Quebec.

In conclusion, Quebec is strong, Quebec's society is strong, Quebec's culture is strong. It has provided Canada with outstanding social, political, and economic leadership. While the challenges to the French language in North America are great, Quebec society is not so weak as to require resorting to the erosion of basic rights to meet that challenge. We must not encourage the use of such measures by amending the Constitution so as to permit them.

Mr. Waddell: Madam Speaker, I agree with the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) in that those who are opposing the Meech Lake Accord, as I am, are not anti-Quebec. Indeed, we all think that we need a strong Quebec. I, personally, think that we need a distinct society clause for Quebec. We just have to be careful that we do not overrule the Charter of Rights and the rights of minorities which are protected in that Charter, including the English-speaking people of Quebec.

Is the Member voting for the Accord? I think there is a little hypocrisy going on in the House, although I am not accusing the Hon. Member of that. People are putting forward amendments, as tokens. In fact, they are not prepared to follow them up with real jam, if I can use that term, that is, to vote against the constitutional proposal because it is flawed. Instead they are moving amendments knowing that they will not be accepted because the Government said from the beginning that it would not accept any amendments.

Would the Hon. Member tell me whether she agrees with my latter analysis? Would she tell us which way she will be voting on this motion?

Mrs. Finestone: Madam Speaker, I pointed out that I hoped we would accomplish the goal of nation building and making Quebec a signator at the constitutional table without in any way reducing the rights of any Canadians. Although I am aware of the narrow-mindedness and mean-spiritedness with which this debate was brought to the House, it remains my hope that the amendments moved by my Party, particularly the first amendment moved by my Leader, will be given serious consideration and will be voted on in the affirmative. If it is not and if the minority rights of English-speaking persons in Quebec are in jeopardy, I, as their spokesman, will vote no.

Mr. Berger: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) is probably familiar with the speech made by Gil Remillard, the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs in Quebec, at Mont Gabriel in the spring of 1986. In that speech he set forward Quebec's conditions for signing the Constitution.

He stated that the Government of Quebec had three objectives, one of which was to try to improve the situation of French-speaking minorities outside Quebec. In particular, he referred to Section 23 of the Constitution and expressed the hope that it would be possible to remove the qualifying