

**Senator Olson:** We were. They decided that they would not sign it.

**Senator Murray:** —to welcome Quebec back into the Canadian constitutional family. The ten premiers, meeting in August of 1986, decided that the return of Quebec to the constitutional family had to be their constitutional priority. They agreed to negotiate that on the basis of the five reasonable conditions that had been put forward by Premier Bourassa and to consider further constitutional amendments after Quebec had been welcomed back to the constitutional family.

The objective in the Quebec Round was precisely to achieve Quebec's return to the constitutional table. Aboriginal constitutional rights, Senate reform, fish, and all other constitutional reforms were to be put off until the second round. There was no reason to expect, especially after the expiry of the Aboriginal process of 1987, after four first ministers' conferences on the subject, that an amendment on self-government could have been achieved during the Quebec Round.

Having said that, I should like to point out to the honourable senator that section 16 of the Meech Lake Accord does contain a number of matters of interest to the Aboriginal peoples. That section makes it clear that the interpretation of clauses on the "distinct society" and linguistic duality do not affect either section 35 of the 1982 act, section 25 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867.

**Senator Olson:** While you are rewriting history, and until you get past the stage where you are rewriting all the terms and conditions that were in effect ten years ago, we will not get anywhere with these answers. We are getting replies that are complete red herrings, and that ignore the importance of the question that has been put.

**Senator Murray:** Honourable senators, since the honourable senator has opened the subject, I should like to table copies of the letter in English and in French that Prime Minister Mulroney sent on June 18 to Mr. Phil Fontaine, Provincial Leader, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

**Senator Olson:** Would you underline the parts that are new?

**Senator Murray:** I would have thought that the honourable senator, who today is posing as such a knowledgeable champion of Aboriginal peoples, would be able to draw the conclusions himself.

**Senator Olson:** There is nothing new in there.

#### TIMING OF CONSIDERATION BY FIRST MINISTERS

**Hon. Paul Lucier:** Honourable senators, on April 28, 1988, I asked the Leader of the Government in the Senate a question, part of which was:

Is the government considering recalling the premiers to try to come up with something that would make the Meech Lake Accord acceptable rather than just let it die? It seems to me that the objective of everyone in this exercise has been to try to improve the accord.

I had asked that question after the election in Manitoba. The reply from the minister at that time was:

• (1450)

Honourable senators, the government will see the Meech Lake Accord through to the end. We are committed to the Meech Lake Accord. The choice is not between this accord and some other hypothetical accord; the choice is between this accord and no accord.

I wonder if the minister would now like to reconsider whether he might not have thrown the dice perhaps a couple of weeks sooner?

**Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations):** Honourable senators, the statement I made stands the test of time. As a matter of fact, Premier McKenna, for example, in bringing forward a companion resolution, implicitly agreed that the accord is, as I have said before, a seamless web. You could not reopen it to amend it—

**Senator Olson:** No matter how offensive it is, you cannot reopen it?

**Senator Murray:** —without having it go back through all the legislatures that had already passed it and starting a three-year time clock ticking all over again. Every time some legislature would make some change in the accord, no matter how small, a new three-year time clock would start and all legislatures would have to retrace their steps again. That is what we were left with as a result of the 1982 amending formula.

What Premier McKenna tried to do with his initiative, and what the 11 first ministers agreed upon here a few days ago, was to see the Meech Lake Accord pass as is with a companion resolution and some further improvements to our Constitution in general.

**Senator Lucier:** Honourable senators, I do not know that that is quite true. It seems to me that Premier Wells did not agree that he wanted the Meech Lake Accord passed as is. I thought he had agreed that he would present it to his legislature. I also did not think that Premier Filmon or, for that matter, Premier McKenna were very pleased with what was in the accord. What they have all said is what I was saying two years ago: This is a very flawed document; why do you not get at it and try to change it? You would not then be in the situation you are in today, whereby the Meech Lake Accord will die this weekend. It will die because everybody refused to deal with it. Is it not the case, with respect to this accord, that this government decided that they would wait until the last possible moment to throw the dice and try to hoodwink and bamboozle everybody into accepting it? Again, that is typical of the Mulroney government?

**Senator Murray:** I am sorry that at such an important moment in the history of this country the best the honourable senator from the Yukon can do is make cheap and petty political comments.

**Senator Olson:** It is not cheap and petty. It is a fact!