

Constitution Amendment, 1987

Greater rights are given to the provinces on immigration matters. The Cullen-Couture Accord, as far as I am concerned, goes far enough. There is no need to give provinces greater powers. Immigrants should not and cannot be forced to reside in a specified province. Immigrants choose Canada when they come, not Ontario, Quebec or British Columbia, but the whole Canadian nation.

Because of the erosion of power of future Parliaments, federal-provincial constitutional meetings will from now on be institutionalized. The result will be that joint committees and Parliaments will not be able to make changes to future accords for all sorts of reasons, as it is the case now. Canada's future constitutional changes will then be written, if we adopt this Accord, by a process reminiscent of a board of directors consisting of the Prime Minister of the day and the 10 Premiers as well.

Once the Accord is approved as it is proposed, everyone in the House knows that it will be virtually impossible to make substantial changes to federal institutions in the future. Once passed, this Accord will be cast in cement and it will be Canada's Constitution.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the Constitution is the mirror in which we see ourselves as Canadian citizens. It is the instrument that we agree upon to divide powers so as to get things done for the benefit of the nation and of all its citizens.

This Accord is not good because it weakens Confederation. It gives the wrong picture of Canadian society. It leaves the public out of future changes. It gives the provinces new powers without giving to the national Government, to Canada itself, new powers as well. Therefore, it produces a one-way flow of powers in the direction of the provinces without benefiting the national interests.

For these reasons, I oppose the Accord. My reasons are based on a number of considerations. Fundamentally, I reject the definition of Canada in Section 2(1). I find it outdated, a vision of the past. This is why I call it a rear-view mirror. That is not the Canada that we experience and see every day, be it urban or rural Canada. We do not want to leave out of our Constitution those who do not identify themselves with the French or the English culture, and we do not want to have in the Constitution as an add-on, an afterthought, the consideration that is due to our aboriginal people, to the minority groups and to immigration groups. Hence, I look forward to the debate later on when there will be an opportunity to put forward an amendment on the definition of Canadian society, an amendment which proposes a definition which I think is the proper and more contemporary one for Canada to consider.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Questions and comments. There are no questions, so we will resume debate.

Mr. David Daubney (Ottawa West): Madam Speaker, as a member of the special joint committee of the Senate and House of Commons which looked into this matter, it is an honour for me to participate in this important debate today. I

am very proud to have my signature on the report of our committee. I would be bold enough to suggest that I think it is one of the finest parliamentary reports ever to be handed down in the history of this institution.

The constitutional Accord of 1987 itself is an historic document. It truly marks a turning point in our constitutional history. It closes a difficult chapter that began when Quebec was left out of the agreement leading to patriation and to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982.

The 1982 reform was a major, significant and important advance in our constitutional development, but it was incomplete. It did not include all of Canada. Quebec's distinct identity within Canada and our linguistic duality as a country were glaring omissions from the 1982 description of our national values. The elected Government of Quebec did not join the other nine provinces in support of the agreement.

As the Hon. Robert Stanfield told us at the joint parliamentary committee hearings in 1982, we created two Canadas. By recognizing linguistic duality and Quebec's distinct identity within Canada, the 1987 Accord completes the constitutional picture drawn in 1982 of how Canadians see themselves, of Canada as it is, in the words of our committee.

Quebec's acceptance of the Accord makes Canada whole again. The chapter that opened in 1982 is now closed. Now we can write a new and happier chapter for the Accord unblocks the constitutional reform process. It offers new means and new hopes for reaching such long-held goals as Senate reform and for addressing a number of other issues raised before our joint committee.

As Hon. Members know, the Government of Quebec had been watching the constitutional reform process from the sidelines ever since the 1982 package was put together. With the Accord in place, it can return, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) foresaw, with honour and enthusiasm to the constitutional bargaining table.

This is a development of measurable importance. Quebec's isolation was more than a rebuke to the values of moderation and tolerance that we cultivate as Canadians. It was also a real obstacle to further constitutional reform. There are dry, mathematical reasons for this. Without Quebec's participation, it would be all the harder to secure amendments calling for the support of seven provinces representing half the population. It was impossible to pursue reform of the Senate because of Quebec's veto over its representation there and it would be impossible to secure amendments calling for unanimous consent.

More important are the reasons related to our democratic and federal principles. No solid or lasting reform would be possible when a large segment of the population felt that its wishes had not at least been considered.