

*The Constitution**[Translation]*

—as we say, we should not put the cart before the horse, and find ourselves in a situation where my agreement of today would turn into a disagreement because of nit-picking about the meaning of words.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, as this century draws to a close and we, as Canadians are seeking to redefine the values we share and confirm our common identity, we realize that Canada's unity is closely linked to our respect for diversity. And I therefore support the motion of the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), the master builder of the historic Meech Lake accord.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind all Canadians that in a speech at Sept-Îles in August, 1984, the Right Hon. Prime Minister said that the very existence of this country was the result of a commitment by men and women of diverse cultures, languages and religions to resolve their differences, to harmonize their interests and to let the values of respect for others and a firm belief in one's own potential prevail.

Mr. Speaker, are we seeing the dawn of a new beginning in this country? I have often wondered whether my Quebec nationalism would be compatible with a pan-Canadian context and status. I believe that in the final instance, my feelings of pride are not so different from those of my colleagues in the Atlantic provinces, western Canada and Ontario.

It seems to me that today in Canada, in every part of this country, there is a common desire to affirm our various identities, to respect all aspirations and the potential for pursuing the most ambitious ideals.

Like so many fellow Quebecers, Mr. Speaker, I took part in the process that brought us here today with occasional feelings of reluctance, a feeling that we were being asked to give up too much, that there was a general lack of understanding for our position and also that we as Quebecers would not feel at home in this country. We sometimes had the impression that to some politicians, this country was a purely utopian dream that would never come true. Mr. Speaker, I think it is useful to recall that these fears and hesitations are part of this country's history and part of the reality on which we must build for the future.

Confronted with geographical, linguistic and cultural differences, we needed time to find our common ground, our common political aspirations. As a result of frank and forthright efforts at conciliation and the recognition of the basic tenets of a hard-won but ever vital reciprocity, today we are nearing the goal already pursued in 1864 by the Fathers of Confederation.

● (1600)

Mr. Speaker, I am one of those representatives, one of those who have not always looked at the situation as we see it today, which gives us a much broader perspective of our country. We

have all seen its regional particularities, its linguistic singularities, its cultural identities and, of course, its divisive elements.

Quebecers—surely because of language considerations mostly, but for other reasons as well—have been forced to proclaim, sometimes with infinite patience, their basic rights and their fair demands. In this sharing exercise which makes a great nation, they long harboured the impression that they were losers and they hesitated for a long time. They even went as far as proposing different options, Mr. Speaker, and I would suggest with all the consideration this issue commands that we can now appreciate some of the realities of 1980.

After seven years, Mr. Speaker, history no longer passes judgment on people. History can only confirm the facts and assess realities, and it will be up to those who will follow us to define and weigh these choices of 1980. At that time of deep reflection my own political convictions were torn between my attachment to this country and my pride in and allegiance to the other homeland, a double adherence which typifies each Canadian residing in this country. I know now that at the time many Quebecers were intent on continuing their exhaustive quest and deep interrogation with respect to the prospects for Canada and to the common and reciprocal will to build a home where living together is possible indeed but also pleasant and livable—pleasant in the sense that it pleases each and everyone, livable in the sense that one feels at home, and in the sense that one can fulfil one's personal life aspirations.

When I agreed to come to Ottawa to serve the interests of my region, first and foremost I wanted to echo the sentiments of Quebec within the Canadian confederation. I had to cope with a number of facts which until that time in my life did not have the rallying power they have gained since then.

[English]

I have expanded my horizon from sea to sea. I became an active Member of the House and I am pleased to serve as a member of the Cabinet and to participate in the decision-making processes of the Government of Canada.

[Translation]

I have learnt a lot from all those teachings, but I have nevertheless always felt that I belonged with that society which is now being recognized as a truly distinct one by the whole country.

This sensitivity, this openness shown by our 1987 Canada, show me that I, as a great Quebec nationalist, can be a full member of this great—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, let us think of those who have come from Quebec to Ottawa since 1867; let us pay tribute to those who, in a sometimes hostile environment, stood up for Quebec in the federal arena; let us think of my present colleagues, honorable members of this House who came from Quebec in 1984 to represent their fellow citizens and defend their basic rights to equality and a fair share. I sympathize