

*The Constitution*

[Translation]

**Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to acquaint this House with the opinions of my constituents from Saint-Hubert and their analysis of the future of Quebec in general and the proposals of the federal government in particular.

I must say at the outset that to a number of my constituents the refusal of English Canada to sign the Meech Lake Accord was interpreted as a clear and simple rejection of the distinct society in one of the two founding nations of this country. My constituents cannot accept the status quo, nor offers which would be inferior to those of the Meech Lake Accord. When they look at the constitutional future of Quebec, they do not focus solely on economic considerations. They have a clear and broad understanding of the issues, and are conscious of the differences of opinion, but they are also tired of the continuous misunderstanding in English Canada.

Mr. Speaker, for the Quebecers in my riding of Saint-Hubert, the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, the tabling of the federal proposals and the comments heard during the various conferences and consultations confirm an unreconcilable evidence. We are faced with a totally different view of the territory on which two nations co-exist, against their will, for historical reasons. For my constituents, this unreconcilable difference is evident in many respects.

First of all, English Canadians want a strong central government in Ottawa. Quebecers want a strong government in Quebec City; English Canadians want to centralise powers in Ottawa, Quebecers want to centralize them in Quebec City; English Canadians want a country where everybody uses English as the language of communications; Quebecers want to live, work and create in French.

English Canadians have their culture, their theatre, their cinema and their television. Quebecers also have their culture, their theatre, their cinema and their television. English Canadians have a deep affection for the Queen and her family, for the British monarchy, which they consider very important. Quebecers have no interest whatsoever for that institution, particularly when the Governor General is unilingual English. English Canadians are proud to be Canadians. Quebecers identify themselves with Quebec and are proud to be

Quebecers. English Canadians consider that Labrador is part of Newfoundland. Quebecers still consider that territory as belonging to Quebec.

The list is long, Mr. Speaker, and could go on and on. This exercise may seem tedious to you, but it is important and necessary if we want to fully understand what my constituents say, particularly when they claim that the existing proposals of the federal government are meaningless, that they are not formal proposals and that we should not even waste our time dealing with them.

In fact, these proposals which Ottawa made in September, are another blatant example of what is irreconcilable. The leader of the Bloc Québécois, Lucien Bouchard, was the first to sound the alarm, to point out the Machiavellian power grabbing by the central government which led Quebecers to believe its proposals were fabulous.

When the president of *Sun Life of Canada* considers the federal proposals reasonable and attractive, any good Quebecer must not only be puzzled, but very, very suspicious, and he or she must look twice at these proposals. Indeed, John Gardner, president of the *Sun Life Insurance of Canada* stated, last November 8, that the federal proposals were, and I quote: "a reasonable and attractive initiative".

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Quebecers in my riding, like all Quebecers in general, cannot be fooled. For them, Ottawa's proposals represent a considerable retreat from Meech, for three reasons. First, the distinct society clause is now entrenched in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a constructive rule applicable only to the Charter, while in Meech it was applicable to the entire Constitution.

Second, the Canada clause, section 2 of the Constitution, lists several characteristics including, in sixth place, a basic responsibility for Quebec to preserve and promote its distinct society. This section is being diluted and will virtually have no effect, except a vague constructive effect, like that of a preamble.

Third, a limitative definition of the concept of a distinct society is given—language, culture and civil law—which of course restricts its scope.