

We can never forget that the existence of this country was not a given. That our history has been a continuous act of affirmation. That the building of Canada was a task accomplished against odds - geographic, economic, demographic. That if we do not continue to grow, we decay. And that tending this community that is Canada requires care. It will not tolerate abandon. Nor will it long tolerate intolerance. How ironic it would be, how wasteful, if, at a time when the rest of the world was thrusting forward with vision and imagination, the people of this charmed country would turn away from our strength and our future.

Canada won't work if we live in two solitudes - or ten - or a hundred. The interests of each community, each province, each region of this land only suffer if the interests of the others are not recognized and accommodated. Canada is constructed on compromise. Compromise not in the sense of second-rate or second-best. But compromise which sees advantage in balancing interests, balancing views, balancing powers and responsibilities. For Canada, compromise is not a dirty word. It is a fundamental requirement, a virtue of nationhood and nation building. It has been so throughout our history. It must continue to be so in the future.

No one can claim that compromise is easy. It is always easier to impose views or to ignore. It is always easier to unite against something than to agree on a way to work together.

But no society can grow if its primary activity is denial - denial of the interests of others, denial of real opportunities for change, denial of the lessons of history.

So we know what won't work. But we also know what will work. What will work is the atmosphere which existed in those magic moments at Meech Lake in April 1987 and the meeting that followed on June 3rd. We tend to forget the elation of those moments, an elation felt from sea to sea across this land. It was an elation born out of accomplishment, a triumphant recognition that ten Premiers and one Prime Minister had accomplished what had eluded Canadian leaders for some one hundred and twenty years: a constitutional agreement freely and willingly embraced by every elected leader in the land.

Premier Peterson called it "a great day for Canada". Premier Bourassa declared with uncharacteristic emotion that "It is with great pride as a Quebecer and as a Canadian that I am here today to express my deep satisfaction with the re-integration of Quebec within the Canadian Constitution". Premier Getty praised the Accord saying that "Albertans have felt, like most Canadians, that Canada has been incomplete without Quebec's participation, and since April 1982 our Constitution has been flawed. We have now corrected that." Premier Devine defined the moment as "magic". He said "It was nation building." Ordinary people of goodwill with deep affection for their community and their country said, "It's good for us to do this."

The Calgary Herald headline read "Equal Partners at Last". The Globe & Mail headline read "The Welcome Pact". And Le Devoir declared "Canada has said yes to Quebec".