

midnight on June 9 at the Conference Centre—with three new Premiers—made the right decision.

Three years ago, the First Ministers had made the right decision on the Meech Lake Accord. Most of the Premiers went along with it. I deplore that all did not persevere to the very end. History will judge their action.

As to Quebec, I feel it showed tremendous patience and dignity.

What are we going to do now? What has the future in store for us? To be honest, nobody knows. As Victor Hugo wrote once: "The future belongs to nobody but God".

I regret the tremendous efforts I made for years to favour the adoption of the Meech Lake accords. As a teacher, I have been concerned for many years with the constitutional issue, I devoted my life to it and have always enjoyed working in Constitutional Law. It was with tremendous pleasure that I cooperated with Senator Murray.

But to return for a moment to Quebec's part in all this. Quebec has always managed to strongly influence the Canadian Constitution. This time it failed. I wish to emphasize that we, as Quebecers, should be careful not to lump together all English Canadians. A great many says yes to Quebec. This should be emphasized again and again. Others said no. Some are in high places.

● (1940)

Honourable senators, in my opinion, those in English Canada who said no were not able to read what the events were telling them. A period of great uncertainty is beginning today.

Honourable senators, we must learn to bring more rigour in our debates. I have always thought substance prevailed over procedure. I have always thought the desire of a people, a population or the great Canadian nation prevailed over the narrow confines of partisan concerns.

Let us never forget we were right in bringing Quebec back to the constitutional table. I heard at noon a debate on whether Quebec was legally bound by the Constitution. Of course; no jurist has any doubt about that in Quebec. The issue is not whether Quebec is bound by the 1982 constitutional amendment, that is obvious.

The fact is, as Senator Murray pointed out, that Quebec's National Assembly did not say yes in November 1981. The independence forces were not alone, Senator Olson, there were also Claude Ryan and his party. They are federalists. Care should be taken in our discussions. We wanted to bring Quebec back to the constitutional negotiations. Of course, Quebec is bound by the Constitution. I said it was and would defend that position everywhere.

It is a pity, such a great pity that the debate expanded. Yet, it was the Quebec round. Everyone brought in his demands and the debate took larger proportions. At one point there was even an attempt to solve everything at the same time. That is not possible.

[Senator Beaudoin.]

I am confident Messrs. Mulroney, Bourassa, Peterson and all the other premiers who said yes will in the end be proven to be historically right.

Finally, we must make a distinction between the political situation and the legal process. If tomorrow, in the months and years to come, Anglophones, Francophones and all the various elements that make up this great country of ours, if Anglophones and Francophones want to live together—if, as André Laurendeau said, the political will to do so exists—legal experts will surely find a way to keep them together.

Constitutions exist for people, not the reverse. It is up to the Constitution to adjust to our needs. It is not up to us to adjust to the needs of the Constitution. The same applies to federalism. There is no standard form of federalism, as the Supreme Court of Canada declared. If Canada wants to survive, it will have to adapt and opt for a form of federalism that meets the needs of a country that is not, let us face it, homogeneous. Quebec is what it is. The other provinces are what they are. Quebec has the Civil Code, while the other provinces have Common Law. That is wonderful! What's wrong with that? Quebec is francophone, and the other provinces are largely anglophone. We must learn to live together. I think it would be entirely irresponsible to slam the door shut.

This is a time for sober reflection. We must find a way to reflect together. We must find a way to mature together, at the same pace. When I listen to various discussions, I wonder whether that is what is wrong with us. We are not maturing together. We are not maturing at the same pace.

I don't think Quebec can be blamed for anything. I think it put forward its conditions fairly and squarely. I think Bourassa behaved with a lot of dignity. We will have to be very creative and inventive to get out of this terrible impasse.

Hon. Jean-Maurice Simard: Honourable senators, I would like to make my own contribution to this debate, following Senator David's motion. New Brunswick was a participant and, furthermore, supported the 1982 constitutional amendment for three or four major reasons we felt were very important: to patriate the Constitution Act from the other side of the Atlantic, to enshrine equalization, to include measures in the constitutional text that would deal with regional disparity, plus a few others.

We thought then that it was not perfect. But we realized it was perhaps time to go through this first stage. It goes without saying that a few years later, in 1985-86, we felt it was desirable, given the desire of all the premiers and of the actual prime minister, Mr. Mulroney, to proceed with the Quebec round.

I will spare you the details on the minimal conditions of Quebec, because everyone knows these conditions which led to the accord. We said it in 1982, it was an imperfect document or constitutional act, but we had to go through that stage, it was one step in the right direction.

Quebec would be legally and morally back in the Canadian family. Consequently, it is with great deception and pain that, like all of you, we Acadians assisted to its failure last week.