

Constitution Amendment, 1987

reform and fisheries, both of which are absolutely vital to aboriginal people?

Mr. Valcourt: Madam Speaker, of course, I think the question of aboriginal rights is very important. It is obvious that on June 3 the First Ministers could not agree on putting the question of aboriginal rights on the agenda of the next constitutional conference.

• (1150)

We have had dates agreed to for constitutional conferences on aboriginal rights and it has not worked. Why? As our Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) stated many times, with Quebec at the negotiating table and part of the Constitution the native people stand a much better chance of having the question of aboriginal rights resolved, in particular that of self-government. I understand and appreciate that they would like to see at this stage the issue of aboriginal rights on the agenda at the conference, but experience teaches us that fixing dates for conferences without a consensus does not work. If we had said in 1982 that the Quebec round would take place by October, 1984, or June, 1985, would that have ensured the resolution of the Quebec round? Not at all.

The groundwork the Prime Minister laid down in Sept-Îles was good. He said that we will start consultation and call a conference when there is a chance of reaching a solution. I think that is the best course to follow on aboriginal rights.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The time allowed for questions and comments has expired.

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview—Greenwood): Madam Speaker, I am very excited to be taking part in the process of constitutional development, particularly bringing Quebec back into the constitutional family. I believe the adoption of this Accord by Parliament and the provinces will be an historic occasion on which all Canadians can rejoice.

[Translation]

I remember well how ashamed I felt when the Constitution was signed and Quebec was not there. The Queen came for the ceremony, but Quebec was not part of the Constitution that was signed that day. So our Constitution and the Charter were launched without the agreement of a major part of Canada.

We will now change this unhappy situation. We will welcome Quebec in the Constitution. From now on, we will work together in one Canada in order to renew our country, our Constitution, and this, in a Canada that recognizes the distinct character of Quebec. Together, we will tackle other constitutional problems such as Senate reform and justice for native people.

We cannot solve these problems without the full participation of Quebec.

While the Meech Lake Accord constitutes an important step for Canada, it is not perfect. We in the NDP have proposed some amendments in order to eliminate the injustice suffered

by our northern citizens and to include more considerations for native people.

[English]

We have in particular proposed an amendment. We are not satisfied with the change which means that the Yukon and the Northwest Territories would need to have unanimous consent of the provinces in order to become a province themselves. No other region of Canada had to face that. We do not like the exclusion of the Yukon and Northwest Territories from participation in the selection of Supreme Court justices or Senators. We think that should be changed.

The NDP deeply regrets the failure to reach a just settlement with native peoples and we believe the Accord should have included early consideration by First Ministers of aboriginal rights and self-government.

My riding of Broadview—Greenwood contains many citizens whose heritage is neither English nor French. Many are concerned about multicultural heritage and while the Accord does nothing against recognition of this heritage, it does nothing for it either. We recommend that First Ministers give early consideration to the ethnocultural reality of Canada as a fundamental characteristic.

In the course of looking at the Constitutional Accord many people, particularly women and minority groups, raised concerns regarding the application of the Charter. We have not yet begun to deal with those concerns. We believe there should be a very thorough Charter review and these considerations should be treated seriously.

The incorporation of a Charter in our Constitution was a major change for Canada, moving from a parliamentary system to one with an entrenched Charter. That gave an enormously greater role to the courts. Of course we have to review the results of that change. We must adapt where we see that the results are not those desired or intended.

I want to get on to some major considerations raised in the constitutional debate, considerations which make some people worried about accepting the Accord as it stands. I want to begin with the very serious concern regarding women's equality. I am a feminist. I was very actively involved in the Charter fight for women's equality back in 1981-82. Frankly, I am not one of those who was keen on a Charter and thought with some confidence that it would solve our problems. Certainly when we saw that there was going to be a Charter, I, along with other women, acted in a very determined way to ensure that the Charter would be good for the women of Canada. I am very concerned that this Accord respects the gains the women's movement made in 1982.

The first version produced in 1982 was very inadequate. It would have worsened the situation of women. Yet we saw the women's movement come of age, and the enormous force of that movement changed the Charter. The wording was changed. For that reason we can understand why women are suspicious of this new Accord. We have not been treated