

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

I was extremely surprised to see the situation resolved. Mr. Mulroney had stated it was necessary that Quebec adhere to the Constitution with honour and enthusiasm. This has been achieved in my view."

Many experts who appeared before the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on the 1987 Constitutional Agreement also lead us to conclude that the Meech Lake Accord was a solid document that ends Quebec's constitutional isolation and strengthens national unity. No major flaw was found. Distinguished law experts, such as Professor Lederman from Queen's University, Mr. Yves Fortier, former President of the Canadian Bar Association, and Professor Gérald Beaudoin of the University of Ottawa stated they were satisfied with the present wording of the accord.

Veteran participants and researchers in the area of federal-provincial relations such as Robert Stanfield, Jack Pickersgill, Gordon Robertson, Peter MacKinson and Professors Richard Simeon and Peter Leslie, the former and present directors of the Inter-Government Relations Institute, have stated that in the circumstances the accord could not be any better. They were unanimous in concluding that such a favourable opportunity must be taken to end the round of discussions on Quebec and to open up the constitutional reform process.

Mr. Gordon Robertson, the former Cabinet Secretary under the Trudeau Government, took part in all the conferences from 1968 to 1969 and attended throughout all the 1980 and 1981 conferences as a CBC analyst. In his view, in order to analyze the 1987 Accord we must first ask ourselves what prime policy goals we want to set up in 1987 in the constitutional area. The federal Government has decided, and the provincial Governments have agreed, that the prime goal was to have Quebec become a fullfledged partner in the Canadian Confederation. Like Mr. Robertson, I am deeply convinced that major policy goal was the right one.

Madam Speaker, to those who fear that the Accord may weaken the central Government, my answer is: not at all! Quite the opposite! Indeed, the Meech Lake Accord will strengthen our federalism in two ways: first, by providing greater legitimacy to our institutions and greater harmony for the exercise of jurisdictions at every level of government.

Since it reaffirms the will of each region to promote the well-being of the country, the Accord will strengthen the ties within Confederation. Moreover, by acknowledging the importance of each province in the development of our collective options, we will thus strengthen the federal character of Canada.

By allowing the provinces to have their say in the appointments to the Supreme Court, the Accord will voice within one of our most important institutions the spirit of true federalism. Considering the acknowledgment in our basic legislation of the specific character of Quebec in Canada, the Meech-Langevin Accord shows that we are ready to live in a community while respecting our differences and our ties.

Madam Speaker, all Quebecers and Canadians throughout the country should rejoice and have confidence in the new concept of co-operative federalism as advocated by our Government and the Premiers of all our Canadian provinces.

Madam Speaker, like all Canadians from whatever region, I am deeply attached to my province, Quebec, and to my country, Canada. I have no qualms whatsoever about this feeling of dual belonging because to me, far from being a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength, and this also makes us greater as a nation.

That is where lies the full portent of the Meech Lake Accord. Its amendments to the Constitution are nothing more or less than the perception of all Canadians. The Accord attests to our confidence in ourselves and in our collective future.

It projects the image of a federal state where a strong national government speaks on behalf of all citizens. It mirrors a federation where the central government plays its role of guardian of the national interest with the close co-operation of provinces.

Madam Speaker, with this Accord today we can look to the future with confidence. There is only one strong Canada, the kind of country which the Conservative Government has always advocated and of which, as I said on many occasions, I am very proud.

Madam Speaker, the Saskatchewan and Quebec legislatures have already endorsed the Langevin-Meech Lake Accord. As federal Members of Parliament from all regions of Canada we are gathered in this House to debate the Accord.

Again I want to express my heart-felt hope that the Accord will be ratified as soon as possible, and this is why I urge all Hon. Members, whatever their political persuasion, to give it their unanimous support and, at last, to say a resounding yes to Quebec.

As I pointed out earlier, the interests of all Quebecers, naturally, and as a Member from Quebec, I am especially aware of these interests, but most of all, the interests of all Canada are at stake.

I therefore ask, Madam Speaker, all the Members of this House and all Senators, who will also have to ratify this Agreement, to respect the will of the Canadian population and to vote unanimously and without reservation in favour of having Quebec rejoin the Canadian constitutional family.

The Meech-Langevin Agreement is a major step toward national reconciliation, and both this House and the provincial legislatures which have not already done so must ratify it without delay in the interests of all Canadians and for the future of our beautiful country, Canada.