

Constitution Amendment, 1987

this Accord because it recognizes Quebec as a distinct society on historical and sociological grounds, but as an Italian-speaking Canadian very much involved in the Saint-Léonard area better known as "La Petite Italie", does my colleague from Saint-Léonard—Anjou think that his constituents feel threatened by this distinct society? Together with his community, does he feel that the French speaking majority will take unfair advantage of its new status, or will life in Quebec continue to progress as now, through a greater affirmation of the French-speaking community along with other communities, whether Italian, Greek or Portuguese, and will the English community be able to continue attending to its business as before?

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Montreal—Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) for giving me this opportunity to speak about something which I had not mentioned in my short intervention.

The answer to his question is definitely no. In my opinion, all Canadians will have questions to ask about any agreement of this type. However, on the whole, the fact that Quebec will finally sign the Constitutional Act which it had not ratified in 1982 is so positive that nothing else matters. We believe that some of the weaknesses in this Accord can be corrected in due time since this is just a summary and certain points may have been omitted and the interpretation given to certain words or phrases could create unforeseen problems.

I believe that these will come out in due course and that the necessary adjustments can be made.

I come from an area in East Montreal, Saint-Léonard, which is well-known for its linguistic conflicts. These certainly had positive results. We wanted linguistic rights and we won a partial victory. However, another thing that should be recognized about this conflict is that the Francophones were also able to express their views and their wish to have their own language protected. Everytime I speak to my Italian-speaking fellow citizens, I point out that it is important to keep more than two languages in Quebec and important that our children continue to learn Italian. This is why, Mr. Speaker, I support the distinct society clause, and I would like to tell my colleagues who might feel threatened by this provision that Francophones are a minority in Canada, and that if we want to protect our minorities, we must also protect the French-speaking minority. I believe that it is because of this that we have succeeded in Canada, and I think that Quebec is a good example of what can be achieved, if not a perfect example since nothing is perfect in this world. But it is a telling example of the fact that, notwithstanding our numerous linguistic skirmishes, current relations between francophone Quebecers and multicultural communities are perfectly and unbelievably harmonious, that in the end we will continue to prosper as long as people remain objective and ever intent on seeking to do better, but with the understanding that every individual has the right to exist and to protect both his language and his culture.

Mr. Berger: Mr. Speaker, in his answer to my colleague from Montreal—Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) the Hon. Member again referred to this harmony which appears to exist or in which some people would have us believe. He too seems to believe that a new harmony, a new openmindedness prevails in this country. He is not the first Member to refer to this openmindedness. In fact all those who endorse the Accord, practically all of them, mention this openmindedness. But then we ask them this question: Why did the governments not want to commit themselves to promote linguistic minorities instead of simply protecting them? Their answer is that we must appreciate that there are still a few pockets of resistance in this country, and then the governments simply cannot forge too far ahead of the Canadian population.

Well, here is my question to the Hon. Member: Does he believe that indeed harmony prevails, or is this answer... Does this harmony upon which the Accord is supposed to rest not make him wonder a little bit? If the openmindedness is genuine, why would they not commit themselves not only to protect but also to promote the cause of linguistic minorities as advocated by the *Fédération des francophones hors Québec*, the Franco-Manitoban Society, Canadian Parents for French, and others?

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the Hon. Member was not in the House or was not listening carefully. In my speech I said that this Accord was not a perfect one, and that we in the Liberal Party had proposed a number of amendments to correct any inadequacies it might contain. I also said that negotiations were started on the Accord because Quebec had not signed the 1982 constitutional Accord, and that the basis for these negotiations was the five constitutional demands made by Quebec, the first being its recognition as a distinct society. I said that nothing was perfect in this world, including this Accord, but the fact remains that it was instrumental in getting Quebec to sign the constitutional Accord and in achieving the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society. I say recognition, because nothing new has been added, no additional powers given. We recognized what Quebec has been, is and will be; a distinct society, different from the other provinces.

As far as harmony is concerned, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest the Hon. Member take a walk down the streets of Saint-Léonard, and he will see for himself. The people of Saint-Léonard do not feel threatened by the constitutional Accord. They may feel threatened by the economy, because many young people are unemployed, but they are certainly not threatened by the constitutional Accord. And when I say harmony, because I live in that area... Only yesterday, I was walking down the street, and I can inform the Hon. Member that not a single constituent asked me whether he should feel threatened.

It is not a perfect Accord, I agree, but I think we are making progress by improving our Constitution and by trying, in a society as complex as ours... Canada is not the easiest