

And even this so-called "patriation" was flawed by the fact that one of the major provinces, Quebec, refused to accept the terms of patriation.

As an act of national re-conciliation, our party and our Prime Minister pledged to do everything possible to bring Quebec back into the constitutional fold.

When the separatist Parti Québécois (PQ) was defeated by the Quebec Liberals in December 1985, the new provincial government replaced the 22 constitutional conditions of the out-going PQ government with five specific constitutional proposals. These proposals formed the basis for the so-called "Quebec Round" and an agreement in principle was reached with the federal government and all 10 provinces at a meeting at Meech Lake in April 1987.

But this is where the "only-in-Canada-constitutional-Catch 22" syndrome went into overdrive.

According to the arcane constitutional rules, some of the Meech Lake proposals required unanimity of approval by the federal parliament and all 10 provincial legislatures within a three-year time period.

But in Canada, governments have no fixed terms, and it is possible that one or all of the players who made the original agreement might not be around by the end of the three-year period.

And so a straightforward "done deal" became a lightning rod for a host of national, provincial, and local issues, and in June 1990, the Meech Lake Accord unravelled.

What followed was an emotional maelstrom and a political nightmare, as various interests and factions sifted through the entrails of Meech Lake, formed their own conclusions, and created new alliances.

Two new parties emerged -- the avowedly separatist Bloc Québécois and the Western-based Reform Party.

To make matters worse, Canada, along with the other countries of the industrialized world, experienced a major economic downturn after over six years of sustained growth, so that the traditional reinforcements between economics and politics provided an even more hostile arena for constitutional renewal.

Two significant consultative processes followed the failure of the Meech Lake Accord.

A technical one, the Beaudoin-Edwards Special Joint Committee examined the complex question of the amendment procedure.