*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

I make no pretense at being a constitutional expert. Nonetheless, I followed these discussions closely. There is great ambiguity and division of opinion. I am not so naive as to suggest that the Constitution of Canada attempted to spell out in detail each and every item within it. To do that would make it as lengthy and incomprehensible to read as our Income Tax Act. I am suggesting that the Constitution must be clear on basic structural matters and clear as to its intent on the fundamental principles and values, and Meech Lake fails that test.

After reviewing the testimony given before our joint committee and that of the Quebec National Assembly, after listening to and reading the comments of those intimately involved in the negotiations like Mr. Gilles Remillard, Senator Lowell Murray, Premier Robert Bourassa and the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), one thing became clear. Either they have not agreed on certain basic principles and have resorted to ambiguity in order to achieve a so-called historic agreement, or they have agreed on certain principles but, fearing public reaction, have chosen to obscure these principles, or worse still, both.

As to structural matters, the spending power concerns me, as does what would happen if there was a deadlock in Senate and Supreme Court appointments because we are effectively making it almost impossible to change. As my time is limited and I want to make some very important points, I would like to move to the next level of my concern outside of the structural ones, the level of values. Let me raise four issues.

First, with respect to economic values, it is astonishing that while the Government views free trade with the United States as fundamental to the future welfare of Canada, Meech Lake is totally silent on the strengthening of the Canadian economic union. I find that unusual and unacceptable.

Second, with respect to aboriginal people, the 1982 constitutional amendments called for a series of conferences to deal with the status and rights of aboriginal people. The conferences ended in failure. Why would Meech Lake, which sets forward an agenda, not include aboriginal rights on that agenda? I think that needs to be reviewed.

Third, with respect to the status of our official languages, Meech Lake stipulates in Article 2(1)(a) that the Constitution of Canada should be interpreted in a manner consistent with the recognition that the existence of French-speaking Canadians centred in Quebec but also present elsewhere in Canada, and English-speaking Canadians concentrated outside Quebec but also present in Quebec, constitutes a fundamental characteristic of Canada. The Government has explained that this embodies its commitment to so-called linguistic duality and it describes this characteristic as fundamental to Canada and that Meech Lake then defines the role of the federal Government and all the provincial Governments in Section 2.2 as being to preserve this fundamental characteristic.

It is essential to note that the choice of the word regarding a fundamental characteristic is mere "preservation", not "promotion". Meech Lake is therefore saying with respect to a fundamental characteristic of our country, that is, linguistic duality, that we can agree on nothing more than its preservation, not its promotion. I say that that is for pickles and jams, not for people.

One need only read the annual reports of the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada. Our linguistic minorities, be they French-speaking or English-speaking, are under serious pressure. In some instances, certain communities face challenges to their very survival. Others face challenges as to their vitality or ability to remain stable, to say nothing of growth.

Over and over again, I heard *un cri d'alarme pour les francophones hors Quebec.* These groups, and it is well documented, are under-served and undernourished. It is also well documented that the English-speaking community of Quebec over the last 10 years, has suffered an over all population decline in excess of 150,000 people. That is more than the population of Prince Edward Island.

If our 11 First Ministers could agree that linguistic duality is a so-called fundamental characteristic, how is it that they could not agree to promote that which is fundamental to Canada? Does national unity not depend on our will to support, encourage and promote those qualities which are fundamental to our identity and make this country so special? The answer to that question is, obviously yes. It is our responsibility as Members of the national Parliament to do just that. If Meech Lake is adopted as is, we will have failed in this responsibility.

Why would the role of promoting our fundamental characteristic not be enshrined in Meech Lake? It is possible, in fact probable, that there are certain provinces that are less than enthusiastic about bilingualism. This political reality may have caused the Prime Minister in negotiating the Accord to decide that he was not prepared to risk losing the agreement by forcing the issue of promotion. Perhaps that was not so wrong, but why does the Accord not at least recognize the role of the federal Government in promoting this fundamental linguistic duality?

In the wake of the tabling of a very progressive reform of the Official Languages Act, this question becomes all the more acute. Undoubtedly, this must and should be one of the federal Government's roles if linguistic duality is really a fundamental reality in Canada. On the face of it, therefore, it would appear illogical for the Prime Minister to resist amending Meech Lake to recognize this role.

The answer to this mystery lies in a closer analysis of the effect of the proposed amendment. It would mean that the provinces would be agreeing to the role of the national Government to promote linguistic duality across this land, including not just the preservation but the promotion of linguistic minorities within the various provinces.

Did the provinces refuse to recognize the role of the federal Government in promoting official language minorities? This is