

Constitution Amendment, 1987

recall the attitude of the Government of the day. Despite the seeming intransigence of that period, amendments were accepted during the process. I believe it is open to the House and to the Government to adopt a similar attitude in this respect.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Our amendments are not based on the premise that the Accord fails because it does not resolve all the unfinished business of Confederation. Our amendments go completely to the matter discussed and decided within the Accord. We do not trespass beyond its boundaries. We understand that there will be a continuing constitutional process.

We also believe that our amendments do not undermine Quebec's conditions for entering the constitutional fold. We seek two purposes: that Quebec adhere completely to the Canadian Confederation and that fundamental rights of Canadians be protected throughout the country in their entirety and plenitude and without difference from province to province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): I was mildly surprised that the Minister did not see fit to deal with either minority report or to deal with the amendments we proposed. He has said that some of his colleagues will refer to those particular subjects, but I would have thought that as the senior law officer of the Crown, he would have given us the benefit of his views and of—he is giving me the thumbs-down sign. That is not the sign of an open mind. That is not the mark of someone who wants to achieve a consensus. That is not the symbol of a Minister who wants to achieve the widest possible agreement for this Accord.

Our amendments seek to achieve the following purposes, and for the benefit of the House, which is after all the highest forum in our country, they are the following. First, we want to include as fundamental characteristics of Canada not only the linguistic duality as spelled out in the Accord, not only the specific or distinct character of Quebec as spelled out in the Accord, but also the recognition of our aboriginal peoples, the recognition of the multicultural mosaic of Canada and the recognition of the regional identities and the advantages of lower trade barriers between the provinces.

We believe that the native peoples should not now be left to feel "out-distincted", to use the apt words of the Inuit committee on national issues. We do not believe that our aboriginal peoples ought to be made to feel less important than other Canadians. The committee was told by key native groups that such an amendment as we proposed would ensure equity and fairness for their peoples.

[Translation]

We also recognize there are Canadians whose first language is neither English nor French. Many groups have stated before

the committee that they felt like second-class citizens, and we want to see the Accord stress both their contribution to the Canadian identity and regional diversity. We want the Accord to reflect the true nature of our Canadian society.

[English]

Second, we want to offer more protection to official language minorities by ensuring that Parliament is responsible for promoting as well as preserving official minority language rights.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): We want to offer every province the opportunity to commit its legislature to promoting as well as preserving our linguistic duality.

[Translation]

Third, we also propose that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms take precedence, in order that the basic rights and freedoms of Canadians are not diminished by possible conflicts with other clauses in the Accord. Especially the rights to equality for women.

We have expressed some concerns over the rights to equality, which might be threatened by the recognition of Quebec's special responsibilities. Canadian women should not enjoy lesser protection than other Canadian women by reason of the distinct society clause.

Although we think that possibility is very remote, we want to ensure that even the most minute threats to our Charter are removed.

● (1220)

[English]

We nonetheless state our support, of course, for the distinct character of Quebec. We do not believe this is a revolutionary concept. We believe we are merely confirming in this Chamber the reality. Quebec does have a distinctive character. Quebec is the only province where French is the language of the majority. There is a different system of law, a unique psychology and a unique history. I do not believe that recognizing that fact in the Constitution is dangerous. I do not believe it will lead to special status or sovereignty association or *le concept de deux Nations*. I believe it is a historical and cultural fact that should be recognized. I do not believe there should be any conflict between that concept and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We seek to ensure that even a minimal risk of that conflict be clarified and this Parliament unequivocally pronounce upon it so that even a slight ambiguity not be left to the courts.

Fourth, we believe in an elected Senate. Despite all the bafflelegab of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice and his predecessor, now the Minister of Transport (Mr. Crosbie), we want Senate reform. As I said in this House two and a half years ago, we believe that is the only fundamental reform which recognizes the geographical facts of this country as against the population of Ontario and Quebec. The Minister