

Canada is the bet made by men and women of different cultures, languages and religions to settle their disputes, harmonize their interests, and successfully promote the values of respect for others and selflessness.

A Conservative Government will take up this bet. Co-operation and understanding will be more than mere words to us. It will be the honour of the Party I lead to make that a way of living, to deal with our fellow Canadians, to suffer, to work, and to triumph with them. One thing for sure is that not a single Quebecer, man or woman, has given federal Liberals free reign to take advantage of Quebec's disarray resulting from the referendum to sentence the province to constitutional ostracism. My Party does not rejoice over the political weakening to which these deplorable incidents have led Quebec. If Quebec is weakened, so is Canada; if Quebec is strong, so is Canada.

There is room in Canada for the affirmation of all identities, respect for all aspirations, and the quest for all ideals.

I know that Quebecers expect more than simple words. We will have to offer guarantees and take positive steps to achieve the objective I have in mind: convince the Quebec National Assembly to endorse Canada's new Constitution with honour and enthusiasm.

Madam Speaker, since the Meech-Langevin Agreement, this is exactly what has been done. As a Quebecer, my fondest wish has come true thanks to the firm will and negotiating talent of our Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and to the open mind of the Premiers, and I am quite proud of it.

This historic Accord puts an end to the constitutional ostracism of Quebec, with terms which are to the advantage of Quebec, of all the provinces, and most important, of Canada as a whole.

As you know, Madam Speaker, the situation in Quebec was not very good during the last twenty years. There was a climate of constant confrontation between the provincial legislature and the central Government. There was no possibility of agreement between the two Government levels. Quebec had been isolated and rejected.

When Premier Bourassa dared to defend the rights of Quebecers, he only succeeded in being called a "hot-dog eater" by then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.

Quebecers have had enough of the obvious lack respect for their views before the 1980 referendum, and it was absolutely essential to back the Federal Government against the wall if we wanted at least to resume discussions. Quebec had to give itself tools to obtain the power to negotiate. As a Quebecer and a Canadian, I was distressed to see Quebec lose ground, and this is why I accepted to chair the yes campaign in the Louis-Hébert constituency for the 1980 referendum. A "yes" victory in the referendum seemed to me the only possible solution to make the Trudeau Government negotiate with the Quebec Government. Unfortunately, at the time of the 1980 referendum, Quebec voters were promised that a no vote would not mean that they were accepting the *status quo*, but rather that they wished a renewed federalism. At the time, there was no detailed explanation of what this renewed federalism would mean, but I believe that everyone understood that it would be a federalism along the lines that successive Quebec governments had supported.

Madam Speaker, the Trudeau Government betrayed Quebecers. Recently, one of my colleagues opposite, the Hon.

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Member for Laval-des-Rapides (Mr. Garneau), following publication of the letter of Pierre Trudeau in the newspaper *La Presse*, recognized the terrible mistake made in 1982 by stating that if he had realized what his then leader was thinking, he would have voted yes in the referendum. In addition, Mrs. Chaput-Rolland, one of the eminent members of the Pepin-Robarts Commission on Canadian unity between 1977 and 1979 and leader of the no committee for 1980 referendum, stated the following before the Special Joint Committee:

In Quebec, we decided seven years ago that Canada was our country. It remains for us to find out if we were right to assert our loyalty. Quite frankly, I must say that I wondered in 1982 whether the suffering, the disputes, and the bitterness which followed the 1980 referendum had really been necessary. We voted for Canada, but Canada, through its central Government, which was so busy preparing to repatriate the British North America Act of 1867, did very little for those who had just openly stated their will to remain within this country. Promises and dreams had both vanished. Not a single Quebecer would want to relive this period in our history.

Madam Speaker, the isolation of Quebec is a problem with which we had to deal when we came to power. It was essential that we not leave it as a legacy to another generation which might have been forced to solve it under more difficult circumstances and at a less favourable time.

Madam Speaker, since the Meech-Langevin accord, I am a proud Quebecer and a proud Canadian. I can tell all Canadians that I am speaking here from the bottom of my heart. I do not claim to be a constitutional expert, but deep inside I know that finally Quebec has resumed its rightful place, its rights finally have been acknowledged after so many years of confrontation, and I must add I am deeply moved. The accord, Madam Speaker, acknowledges the basic aspirations of Quebecers, and as stated by Michel Roy in *La Presse* on May 2, 1987: "What transpired Thursday in the Gatineau Hills is somewhat of a miracle. That accord to a large extent agrees to the five proposals put forward by the Bourassa Government after it was elected. This is an agreement that fully warrants Quebec's concurrence to the Constitutional Act. It protects Quebec's historic rights and legitimate aspirations. It enshrines Quebec's distinct nature. It recognizes the Canadian duality that Ottawa and the provinces are agreed to protect. Premier Bourassa and Prime Minister Mulroney rightfully view it as the conclusion of an exceptional day."

The constitutional expert, Robert Décary, in an interview to the program *Le Point* of May 1, 1987, stated and I quote: "It was not expected that the concept of distinct society would appear in the body of the Constitution itself. The courts now will be able to give it far greater consideration than if it had been written in a preamble. The courts are now empowered to rule that Quebec has the authority and duty to protect the French language."