

be determined to try and get through a sensible stage of constitutional evolution, based on the Meech Lake mirage but fleshing the mirage out with the reality of interpretations and definitions and clarifications so we will know, when we get through it, that we have a country and that we are better off.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Charest: Mr. Speaker, I can hardly believe what I just heard in the House today, from someone who claims, as he said, to be —

[*English*]

Is it true that the Hon. Member is the spokesman? For the record, the Hon. Member acknowledges that he is the spokesperson for the Liberal Party of Canada on the Meech Lake Accord.

[*Translation*]

He has just given us a speech full of misleading arguments and incredible contradictions, not to support Meech Lake, because considering in the time it took him to praise the benefits of Meech Lake and its importance for Canada, no, not to denigrate the Accord — that was basically what was said by the Hon. Member who is the federal Liberal Party spokesman on the Meech Lake Accord, Mr. Speaker.

To put things in their proper context, I would like to provide a historical perspective. It all started in the 1984 election, when the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), the Leader of the Conservative Party, who subsequently became Prime Minister of Canada, promised, in a speech he made in Sept-Îles, to ensure that our Government's first objective in Constitutional matters would be to bring Québec back into the Constitutional fold, Mr. Speaker. That was our objective then and it has been maintained to this very day.

Subsequently, Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Québec submitted five requests to the provincial Premiers at the annual Conference of First Ministers held in Edmonton in the summer of 1986. The provincial Premiers unanimously approved the objective of bringing Québec back into the Constitutional fold. And that is what Meech Lake is all about. The whole point was to bring Québec back into the Constitutional family.

The Address—Mr. Kaplan

Our Leader, after the signing of the Accord—

Mr. Corbeil: With dignity!

Mr. Charest: With dignity. My colleague, the Minister of Labour (Mr. Corbeil), the new Member for d'Anjou—Rivières-des-Prairies and very well known in Québec, emphasized: "With dignity". That has always been the Government's objective and it still is today. However, the spokesman for the federal Liberal Party of Canada on Meech Lake referred to the Accord as a mirage. Is that what you call promoting the Meech Lake Accord which is essential for our province and for Québécois? You called it a mirage?

He also referred to puffery. I am not sure what that means, Mr. Speaker, but I do know he does not mean it as a compliment to Meech Lake.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say just one thing. First of all I want to tell the federal Liberal Party spokesman that today he betrayed a commitment made by his Leader and his Party to Meech Lake and to Québec. You have betrayed that commitment. Stand up and tell us whether you support it!

Mr. Kaplan: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that we have supported and continue to support this process, as evidenced by our vote on the Meech Lake Accord when this issue was raised here.

I do not feel it is a question of bringing Quebec back into the constitutional fold. It is improper to say that Quebec no longer belongs to Canada or that Quebec needs to join Canada again. Quebec is an integral part of Canada as a whole, something each Quebecer and each Canadian is well aware of. The question is not to save the nation. Québécois who were here supported the Accord in 1982. At the time the Constitution was patriated, we had the support of all Québécois sitting in this House. But what could we expect from a Separatist Government in Québec? That it should be in favour of re-affirming and patriating our Constitution? Impossible!

We are here to improve our Constitution. We have put forward suggestions to that effect. The Government has even refused to deal with them and it is this attitude which is responsible for the demise of the Meech Lake Accord. They would not accept amendments. They refuse to broaden their outlook. The Constitution can not be amended just to meet the needs of a single province. This is simply not done! A Quebec round is out of the question.