

Constitution Amendment, 1987

Mr. Speaker, we must recognize that the way of life in Quebec is certainly different from what it is like in other provinces. However, this does not mean that we are not good Canadians and that we cannot be good citizens together and continue to work to build this country.

Mr. Speaker, some have gone as far as saying that recognizing a distinct society in Quebec could reduce the participation of other cultural groups. I would like to reassure the House and say that it is certainly not the case. I believe that Quebec is one of the provinces, but certainly not the only one, which has made the most progress in recognizing cultural communities.

In how many Canadian provinces is the language of the country of origin taught in primary schools, Mr. Speaker? I am not speaking only about English or French as a second language depending on whether the school is French or English, but in Quebec schools, the language of the country of origin is also taught in primary schools from the first grade. In how many Canadian provinces is this possible?

Naturally, there are rather emotional debates in Quebec on the linguistic issue. We only have to look at the newspapers to see all the linguistic debates now going on in Quebec, especially about unilingual signs. There have always been such debates, and even if they can be very emotional, they often help us to understand each other better and they ensure that Quebec is always in the forefront.

At the time of the 1980 referendum, I did not have to stay at home and watch television or read the newspapers to know what was going on, as I was on the front line fighting for a united Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we might read tomorrow in the newspapers that such or such a party supports the Accord or not, but I would like to tell Canadians that, at the time of the referendum in 1980, when the vital issue was whether or not you were for Canada, there were no political parties, but only two sides: yes for Canada and no for Canada.

For my part, Mr. Speaker, I join this constitutional debate in the same spirit. I believe in a strong and united Canada. I am glad that, after a number of years and lengthy discussions, Quebec was finally able to say yes to the Constitution and that we have finally become a united constitutional family. I am proud to have a strong and united Canada and I would also like to have a strong Quebec which will be able to keep its identity.

Mr. Speaker, Canada without Quebec, Canada without a distinct society in Quebec, would not be the Canada we know and love and of which we are all proud. I am sure that we shall continue to improve our country together. It is certainly not the best Accord possible. There were negotiations, and there had to be some give and take as in any other negotiations. The Accord is not perfect.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to pay homage to the former Prime Minister, Mr. Trudeau. And he

knew very well, when he proposed to patriate the Constitution, that even that agreement would not be perfect, and this is why he proposed the Charter of Rights and Freedoms at the same time. Having rights across Canada gives us a foundation to protect us. And from thereon we can—of course with the passage of time people will change—have negotiations. We can do some give and take—take a right that belongs to a province and give it to the federal level, or vice versa. But the important thing is that our Charter of Rights and Freedoms remains there, so that because of that Charter we may all be equal as Canadians and feel very well protected at home.

That is what is important, Mr. Speaker, and I think it must now be acknowledged that without Mr. Trudeau's determination, courage and devotion, we never would have had the Charter of Rights and Freedoms nor patriation, and then we could not refer to the Meech Lake Accord because indeed our Constitution would still be in England.

• (1200)

Therefore, our Canadian Constitution is following a process that does not stop here. I am sure this will move on. The corrections that have to be made, we will make them in due time. With the same or other people, but some day that will be done, Mr. Speaker. Of course I am also concerned, just as my colleagues, about minority rights. And this is why, Mr. Speaker, we for instance on this side of the House have put forward certain amendments. It would be too long to list the amendments, there are two pages of them. But I would just the same like to stress those of great interest to me, those that affect my community, and I believe they are very important—the recognition of native people as a distinctive and basic feature of Canada. That cannot be denied. It must be enshrined, and during the next negotiations we must reach an agreement . . . The recognition of the multicultural nature of Canadian society—today, we can say that in Canada there is neither a majority nor a minority. We are about one-third Anglophones, one-third Francophones, and one-third from the other communities. But it is time that we recognize that fact. And I am sure we will get there.

Let us refer also to the importance, Mr. Speaker, of developing Canada's economic union. Right now, the issue is free trade. It is important that together with free trade with the United States, we achieve in Canada an economic union; we should start to talk about free trade between the provinces and within Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that Quebec has elected to adhere to the Canadian Constitution. In 1980, Quebec had said yes to Canada. In 1985, on the basis of Mr. Bourassa's five constitutional demands, Quebec again said yes to the rest of Canada. I think it is time for the rest of Canada to say yes to Quebec.

Mr. Malépart: Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the Hon. Member for Saint-Léonard—Anjou for his remarks. He was right to mention that a number of people are opposed to