

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

does Quebec want? We were treated to the following new phrases: *maitre chez nous*, equality or independence, sovereignty association, and the referendum debate. Those of us who listened to the radio, read the newspapers, and watched our television screens were involved in a fairly tumultuous event, that is, a country redefining itself as the Quebec society in the Province of Quebec began to redefine itself in the latter part of the 20th century.

Events began to pick up by 1976 with the historic election of the Péquistes in the Province of Quebec. By 1980, Quebecers found themselves involved in an historic debate, an internal struggle between opposing views within regions, cities, towns and families. During the debate in the referendum it was clear that those of us who supported the federalist side were promising Quebecers that there would be a renewed federalism. This was not simply saying no or yes to sovereignty association. This was a positive thing, and it also said to Quebecers that we would engage in a process and at the end of it we would have a renewed federalism. By 1982, part of that was delivered in the 1982 constitution amendment, much of which was taken up by the patriation, the question of the amendment and the question of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But while the rest of Canada said yes to the 1982 constitutional amendment, all political Parties and the National Assembly in the Province of Quebec said no because the 1982 constitutional amendment did not deal with the historic question of the role of Quebec in Confederation. There the matter sat. We had in a sense gone part way, with the Charter, the patriation, the amendment, but responsible leadership and the majority of the people in the Province of Quebec said no.

● (1240)

In 1984, the newly elected Leader of the Conservative Party who became Prime Minister in 1984 said that he was willing to step forward and engage a process which would bring Quebec into the constitutional family with full heart and mind, and I quote: "with honour and enthusiasm". That was followed in June, 1985 by the Quebec Liberal Party coming forward with a document called *Maîtriser l'avenir* describing what in its view Quebec wanted in terms of a definition of its relationship to the rest of Canada. The Party was elected on the basis of that document. That document became the official position of the new Government in Quebec City. In August, 1986 the Premiers of all the provinces and the federal Government agreed that the first constitutional priority would be the five proposals made by the Province of Quebec. Those five proposals are worth noting.

*[Translation]*

First, recognition of Quebec as a distinct society. Second, the guarantee of increased responsibility for immigration. Third, participation in appointing the justices of the Supreme Court of Canada. Fourth, restrictions on the federal Government's spending power. Fifth and last, recognition of veto rights for Quebec on amendments to the Constitution.

*[English]*

Those five proposals became the basis for the constitutional initiative beginning in August, 1986. By April 30, 1987 the historic Meech Lake Accord was established, with the federal Government and the provinces agreeing in principle to those five proposals, the basis upon which Quebec could see its new role in Canada.

On May 11, 1987 an historic resolution was brought into this House by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) indicating that the provinces and the federal Government reached a constitutional Accord fully on those five proposals. On June 17, the joint committee of the House and the Senate was established, and on August 4 until September 1 that joint committee began to hold public hearings. On June 23, 1987 the National Assembly of the Province of Quebec voted yes to Canada on the basis of those five proposals.

The reason I dwell on the timeframe, Madam Speaker, is not because I simply like to quote dates, but it is important to understand that this is not something that came out of the blue or was thought up in a morning. The role of Quebec in Canada is fundamental to the understanding that the country has of itself. Any discussion in any debate of substance on it must constantly recognize the historic context and certainly the events of the last 10 years. It is on the important understanding of making sure that the measure and level of support for this Accord is maintained.

It is not easy to get agreement in this diverse country. When you have three political Parties and 10 provinces willing to support conditions which allow Quebec to play its full role in Canada, we have an historic Accord worth defending. That is why our Government, and I am happy to say other political parties and ten provinces support it.

It is also important, when we go through such an historic event when we change the Constitution in that way, to understand its impact, certainly in two ways. First, what is the impact of the Meech Lake Accord in relation to the Canadian institution, Canadian values and Canadian unity? Second, what is its impact on Canada and on the other partners within the Canadian constitutional family?

Let me deal with the first question, Madam Speaker. What is the impact of the Meech Lake Accord on Canada? Imagine if we did not have this Accord. Imagine where we would be in the 1990s and in the 21st century with a new generation of Canadians without Quebec with heart and mind within the constitutional structure. As the Prime Minister has said on a previous occasion, without Quebec adhering to the Constitution of 1982 through these five proposals we would have the growth of two Canadas; one that followed the 1982 Accord, and one that did not. We would also have a growing disenchantment on the part of the people in the Province of Quebec because we failed to match with our words and action what we put into the referendum debate, because we said there would be a renewed federalism and that we would talk about the role of Quebec in Canada. The 1982 Accord failed to do that.