

The Constitution

[English]

Canada is more than the sum of its ten provinces. Ten provincial flags will never make a Canadian flag. Ten provincial charters of rights are not a Canadian charter of rights and liberties. Two provincial charters which protect the rights of the handicapped will never protect the rights of all the handicapped in Canada.

Canada is more than the sum of its parts. Canada is a society whose citizens have equal rights and liberties wherever they live, wherever they move or wherever they want to live.

Canada is a dream; a dream of equality, a dream of liberty, a dream in which the right to be different is guaranteed in the basic law, in which the rights of Canadians as Canadians, because they belong to this country, are the same everywhere, whether they are men or women, native or from mother countries, or whether they are immigrants full of hope who have just arrived dreaming of liberty and justice.

● (1630)

[Translation]

Quebecers had a unique opportunity to proclaim their unswerving loyalty to this country and their faith in this resolution on May 20. My generation of Quebecers believes in Canada because they are convinced this country can be a society where the freedom to be, the right to be different, the opportunity to develop one's potential can be guaranteed in the fundamental law of the country. There are not ten Canadas, there is only one whose new foundations it behooves us to define. We do not want to retreat behind our differences, or use our French cultural identity as an excuse or a plea to refuse to join in and partake of this great Canadian endeavour which may require some adjustments in our liberties but which, in the long run, will be beneficial to more people. Sir Wilfrid Laurier understood that very well. In 1897, in Paris, he recalled the decision that Quebec politicians had had to take after the 1837 rebellion. He said and I quote:

Those of my fellow citizens who when confronted with this double provision believed in isolating themselves and not taking any part in the national development were not few. Mr. Lafontaine who, at the time, in the absence of Mr. Papineau then in exile, was the most competent man among us, was more highly inspired. I agree entirely with his way of thinking. He thought that to isolate oneself was always an error and that, for us, particularly, to isolate ourselves would be to bury ourselves in mediocrity.

That, Mr. Speaker, is our option, my option: As we enter the first stage in the reform of our institutions and legislation, I strongly believe that this resolution deserves the support of all Canadians because it provides essential safeguards for the preservation of their identity and the best way to achieve their ideal of a freer and more just country.

[English]

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased and honoured that I was able to be in the House today to hear the speech of the hon. member who just took his seat, the hon. member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve (Mr. Joyal). Those of us who sat in the committee for any length of time were very much aware of the difficult task of the chairman in having to preside over the committee, especially for somebody of the character and personality of the hon. member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve who has the reputation in this place for being somewhat of a maverick, and I say that as a compliment. He had to sit there and not say anything; but indeed, in sitting there he presided over that committee with a degree of fairness, impartiality and dignity that I have not seen around here for a long time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: I am, I will say, a little sad that the hon. member, in finally getting a chance to have his say, has said a number of things with which I would find myself fundamentally and basically in disagreement. I thought he and I were philosophical soul mates. Indeed, I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that if he searched deeply within his soul, he would probably find—and I am not accusing him of intellectual dishonesty—if he came from a province which did not enjoy the veto which the province of Quebec does under the amending formula proposed in the bill before us, that the procedures are as abhorrent to him as we on this side of the House find them to be.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: I want to pay tribute to my leader, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), the former prime minister of Canada, who stood alone without an opportunity to consult his colleagues on October 2 and went against what seemed to be at that time the popular wisdom in the country when he said, "Hold on, it is our duty to oppose this." He was the one at that time to identify what the referendum procedure would do to this federation and this country, today and in the future. So we wish to express a debt of gratitude to the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition because it was that opposition which touched off the debate which took place, first in the House, then in committee, and which today is back in the House. That opposition is very important, and the hon. member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve would be the first to agree that it is a very essential part of the process which is taking place here today.

I should also like to join with others in paying tribute to my colleague, the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp), who has carried out the responsibility of being the chairman of our committee on the Constitution with a great deal of dedication, devotion and patience, and I thank him. I am grateful to have the opportunity to thank him publicly for the leadership he has provided us in that committee.