

The Constitution

Today, I call upon the common sense of Canadians who have always shown great generosity, flexibility and understanding. Proof of that is the attitude they displayed by accepting me as a Canadian and electing me to the House of Commons. I believe there is clear evidence that Canadians can be flexible, generous, understanding, and that they can live together.

I represent a riding in the province of Quebec where some bitterness and after-effects still linger following the patriation of the Constitution in 1982, when Quebec was excluded. These after-effects are serious, among francophones as well as among anglophones. I hope that this time around we will take that into account and be able to give to Quebec, as well as to the rest of Canada, their place in our great and beautiful country.

What do Quebecers want? I do not think their objectives are to diminish in any way the greatness or the wealth of Canada.

• (2050)

On the contrary, I think Canada will come out of this enriched and even more beautiful. The fact that Quebec wants to be recognized as a distinct society does not mean that it will consider itself as superior or have any more privileges than the rest of Canada, not at all. Quebecers are only asking to be recognized for who they are. Whether we like it or not, Quebec is a distinct society—a fact acknowledged in the British North America Act—with a different culture and language and its own Civil Code. Many arguments support the notion that Quebec is indeed a distinct society. It seems to me that wanting for all of this to be entrenched in the Canadian Constitution is not such a big deal.

Quebec is valuable to the rest of Canada and vice versa. The fact that we speak French, that we have two main languages and cultures—I say main because there are many cultures in Canada, but two main languages and cultures—only makes Canada richer. Everyone's dream is to come to Canada. Wherever I go and talk to the people—as you know, I have travelled around the world twice and lived in 35 countries, so I have met quite a few people—all they can think of is: how can you become a Canadian? It is hard to understand that while all those people dream of becoming Canadians people already here who take it for granted try to malign them.

It is completely baffling. There are people who say that Canada is harmful to Quebec's interests, but how do we reconcile that with the fact that Quebecers were able to develop their full potential with the rest of the country's citizens, without any restrictions, and that they even have the right to come to the House of Commons and denigrate them when they feel like it? It seems to me they have never in any way been oppressed or deprived of their freedom.

Since Quebec is an asset near and dear to us all, we should all try to understand Quebec's point of view. Quebec has been hurting since 1982. Let's try and understand this and try and bring Quebecers back to join the rest of Canada so they will feel truly Canadian and be proud to carry a Canadian passport. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that if we manage to reconcile and recognize the existence of these two founding peoples of our country, both the anglophone majority and francophones, especially in the province of Quebec, I don't think the going will be quite as rough as people would have us believe.

I am sure that many of Quebec's claims could be satisfied without even touching the Constitution. As the previous speaker pointed out earlier, there is a certain amount of duplication by the federal government and the provinces. In the first place, this duplication costs us a lot of money, and in the second place, it creates a certain amount of rivalry between the provinces. I think that in the interests of all concerned we should start eliminating these areas of duplication as much as possible. We could do the same thing about federal employees in quite a few departments. If we could conduct this exercise in good faith, I am sure that many of Quebec's demands could be met. And as far as the distinct society clause and perhaps the division of powers is concerned, Canada is not going to stop breathing just because of that. Canada is a great country, but with Quebec it is even greater. Quebec is very rich as part of Canada. It seems to me we could bring this commonality of interests together, Mr. Speaker, and it would be in the interests of all Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Ross Belsher (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, I have had many conversations with constituents of Fraser Valley East about the future of our country.