

Constitution Amendment, 1987

decisions be maintained. Territorial leaders such as Tony Penikett who have given so much of their time to the North must be given the opportunity to participate in the important evolution of constitutional debates in this country.

The matter of equality of women and the Meech Lake Accord requires considerable comment. Section 28 was Canada's constitutional commitment to sexual equality. That section was achieved as a result of great effort by thousands of women from every province and territory in 1981 and 1982.

In my view, it is more a matter of consistency than necessity that Section 28 be included in Clause 16. Senator Lowell Murray said that it was out of an abundance of caution that Clause 16 was formulated to include aboriginal rights and aboriginal matters. Even since 1982, court rulings have had dramatically different effects than what was suggested by the Ministers who spoke in the House and in committees back in 1981 and 1982.

• (1730)

We have seen that the courts, in terms of the trade union movement, in terms of freedom of association and so on, did not and were not held in that light by the justices and the courts of the country. In the construction of constitutions it is crucially important that there be consistency. Just as Sections 25 and 27 were included out of an abundance of caution, out of consistency, we are moving an amendment to attempt to get the Government to make the necessary changes to make this Accord better.

I want to spend a moment now on the future of constitutional evolution in terms of Charter review, the ethno-cultural reality of Canada, and the democratic process of how we can deal with what I described earlier as the raw nerves that are out there. Northerners did not have the kind of biological and vocal involvement in this process that there should have been. The leaders from the NWT and the Yukon were excluded, as were aboriginal people. When we see an agenda set for future meetings, including fisheries for example, we have to think very carefully about how to improve the democratic process.

In terms of the democratic process, we have recommended that the special joint committee on constitutional reform carry on and become an ongoing process whereby Canadians who are touched, damaged or feel endangered in some way by rulings of the court or by pieces of legislation brought forward by provincial, federal, or the territorial legislatures will have an opportunity to have their constitutional views aired. There will be an ongoing balance, some forum, some focus where Canadians of all origins, creeds and sects have an opportunity to have their views heard and to have them heard often, before First Ministers' conferences, before we have anything further cooked in the kitchen at Meech Lake, or anywhere else.

On Canada's ethno-cultural reality, we see the linguistic duality of Canada recognized in the Accord as a fundamental characteristic of Canada. The report of the committee states that the ethno-cultural diversity of Canada deserves further

study. I doubt that there is a single Member of the House who would not agree with that. It is crucially important in terms of constitutional evolution with the ever-changing demographic flux within Canada that much greater consideration be given to this. We are urging early consideration of the ethno-cultural reality of Canada as a fundamental characteristic of our nation.

On the matter of Charter review, after the Meech Lake Accord had been struck, we heard concerns raised by women, constitutional experts, and by representatives of visible and other minority groups that go far beyond the scope of the 1987 constitutional Accord.

To come back again for a moment to what I said earlier, one of the crucial things that was missing in this whole process was the involvement of Canadians to a true extent in the process leading up to the Accord. I must say that we have very much the same critical concern from Canadians from coast to coast back in 1981-82. There was not as broad a forum and as broad an opportunity for them to set the seeds of their ideas to fertile soil, for parliamentarians and First Ministers to have an opportunity to grapple with the kinds of wording that would be the most useful and the longest standing for all of us in Canada.

So the democratic process, the Canadian ethno-cultural reality, fairness for Canada's northerners, fairness for aboriginal people, fairness for women, and Charter review, are matters that we feel very strongly should be dealt with in the near future. I have been involved for many years in constitutional matters. I am honoured to say that because of the movement on board now of the people of Quebec and the Province of Quebec it is with open arms, I can tell you from the bottom of my heart, of British Columbians that we receive them. So from the West to the East to the North it has the substance that allows me to vote for it despite its flaws.

• (1740)

[Translation]

Mrs. Suzanne Duplessis (Louis-Hébert): Madam Speaker, it is with deep emotion that I rise in this debate today, and I would hope that all Hon. Members are fully aware that we are living through historic moments about which our children and grandchildren will be talking.

When I decided to be a candidate in the 1984 election in the riding of Louis-Hébert my idea was to promote in particular four goals that were of special concern to me. As I said in this House on October 7, 1986, the first of these goals was to have Quebec sign the constitutional agreement and resume its rightful place in Canada, and to see that its rights were respected.

I had faith in our leader who had committed a Conservative Government to work with all Canadians to achieve national reconciliation. Throughout the election campaign he had made several references to this pledge. Allow me to quote the remarks he made in Sept-Îles on August 6, 1984: