

# Premier Lévesque's objections

The Premier of Quebec, René Lévesque gave three specific reasons for not signing the agreement. One was what he saw as a gap in the formula for amending the Constitution and the other two involved provisions of the Charter.

Federal authorities had offered to discuss these points with M. Lévesque, but he had declined.

His first point concerned the Charter clause guaranteeing Canadians free movement within Canada. He feared that the immigration of non-French-speaking Canadians into Quebec could alter its linguistic balance. The

federal government points out that the provisions of Quebec Bill 101 that established French as the language of work in the province are and will remain constitutional, and it seems unlikely that many citizens who cannot qualify will migrate.

M. Lévesque's second point concerned minority language education rights, which would limit the powers of the Quebec legislature. The government noted that Quebec was willing to offer a right in Bill 101 on the basis of reciprocity with the other provinces. Since all other provinces agreed to this

right in November – based on the language of primary education in Canada of the parents – it will now apply throughout Canada.

A supplementary provision provides that persons in a minority group may have their children educated in the minority language where it is the first language learned and still understood. This was accepted in November by nine provinces and it applies only to them. With their agreement, it will not apply to Quebec until Quebec's National Assembly approves it.

M. Lévesque also objected to the amending formula as adopted in November. He and seven other provincial Premiers had agreed on the basic formula in April, 1981, and had urged its adoption by the federal government. In November one provision was dropped. It provided that a province which "opted out" of an amendment impinging on its rights or powers (as it is entitled to do) would receive appropriate financial compensation. The Premier argued that financial compensation was a critical factor in his acceptance of the formula in April. With the agreement of the other

nine provinces, the federal government reintroduced the obligation to pay financial compensation, but only in the areas of education and other cultural matters – that is, in areas of special concern to Quebec.

A Gallup Poll released on 10 December 1981 indicated that most Quebecers did not endorse their Premier's opposition. Of those polled 80 percent had a firm opinion and to these 58 percent were against that of M. Lévesque. On the federal scene Quebec voters had returned liberal candidates from 74 out of 75 constituencies and of



Cartoon by Franklin.

these 74, only two had voted against the new constitutional resolution.

At the proclamation ceremony for the new constitution, Prime Minister Trudeau, declared that 'One need look at the results of the referendum in May 1980 to realize how strong is the attachment to Canada among the people of Quebec. By definition, the silent majority does not make a lot of noise; it is content to make history. History will show that nothing essential to the originality of Quebec has been lost.'

COURTESY OF THE GLOBE AND MAIL, TORONTO