

*Constitution Amendment, 1987*

The fact is that the Constitution is not the kind of thing about which the average person worries. It is the responsibility of legislators to interest themselves in this question, particularly Members of this Chamber who have responsibility not only for the interests of their particular province but for the interests of the nation as a whole.

With regard to the national interest, the Member mentioned that the three words "We the people" in the U.S. Constitution were argued about for three weeks. After the referendum at the end of May, 1980, the Liberal Government proposed a declaration of principles to be included in the preamble of the new declaration. It starts off with the words "We the people of Canada" and that—

[Translation]

And this provoked the ire and rage of Quebec Nationalists who objected to the use of the words "the people of Canada" because, as they said, it was a negation of their Quebec nationality.

[English]

Mr. Trudeau replied to that in a rather famous open letter to Quebecers.

We all say that we want Quebec in the Constitution. I was one of the Members from Quebec who voted for the constitutional resolution in 1981.

[Translation]

Seventy Quebec Members voted for the constitutional resolution in 1981 because it was in the interests of Quebecers and Canadians.

[English]

**Mr. Nowlan:** The two questions of the Member for Laurier (Mr. Berger) really prompted the answer to the first question. I will throw out, not in a pejorative way, that there really has not been a debate in the House of Commons. When all three Leaders and Parties are together on principle and have a hearing during the summer there is not time for it to percolate out from coast to coast. It is very politically astute to get the measure through, but that is not the way to have a meaningful debate and a better Constitution.

**Mr. Waddell:** Madam Speaker, I want to point out that the Hon. Member is from Nova Scotia, that the Member for Laurier (Mr. Berger) is from Quebec, that I am from Vancouver, and that we all share the same views. There is a feeling stretching across 8,000 kilometres that this is wrong. Since I took my stand, support for it has been running at about 98 per cent. Aside from some bureaucrats who do not like it, the people like the stand. There is that feeling for Canada.

The Member is absolutely right. Due to the process the story is not getting out to the public for debate. I hope to God that somehow, in some way, it will get out and we can fix up the Meech Lake Accord and have a decent Constitution for Canada.

**Mr. Dave Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond):** Madam Speaker, I, too, want to congratulate my colleague from Nova Scotia on his remarks made here this afternoon. I want to begin my remarks with regard to the Meech Lake Accord by stating very clearly and unequivocally that I have great respect and admiration for all those Members who have spoken out in favour of the Accord. I have great respect for the enthusiasm with which they have launched their views. I would hope that in turn and in kind, although my views may be very different from the views of those individuals, they would have the common courtesy and the decency to respect my views which are shared by some Members, albeit not by the majority.

In the short time that I have I will make a few comments about process and about substance. With regard to process, it is difficult to accept that in 1987 11 men would meet into the early morning hours and consummate an agreement and consensus with regard to the most important and fundamental statute affecting our nation.

I have some difficulty with that. I believe, not that that process is inherently wrong, but that it has major omissions. This is not the consummation of a collective agreement. This is a fundamental tool of nation building. I emphasize that it was 11 men who gathered to consummate that agreement. Even more important were the comments made by the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) in July. He said to Members of Parliament and Canadians at large that those 11 had come together to consider the Constitution and that there would be no amendments and no improvements allowed to this particular agreement.

I think by any standard, particularly the objective standard, that one would have to agree that the process of debate, the process of challenging, expanding, exploring, and defining the substance of that most important document has taken a major step backward because Ministers, the Prime Minister, and others have come to the conclusion that, no matter what, these 11 men have made an agreement which can in no way be reformed, improved or amended. Madam Speaker, objectively speaking, that is a wrong process for us to be following in Canada in 1987.

• (1650)

I would now like to talk about the substance of the Accord. We have heard a great deal about it. I have heard the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations say the following, and I do not wish to quote him, but I think I am paraphrasing him correctly. If I am not, then I am sure Hon. Members will jump to their feet to correct me. He has led us to believe that the provisions within the constitutional Accord of 1987, particularly as they relate to the phrase "distinct society", do not really mean anything. That is one thing. Fortunately, or unfortunately, Members and individuals of the Province of Quebec have put a different interpretation on it.