

this House and in this country, that the Parliament of Canada cannot wait forever for that kind of agreement. Parliament has a duty to act.

I want to speak for a moment, if I might, of the nature of that duty, the nature of our responsibility to the aboriginal people of the country. One in this nationalist age would be reluctant to quote a poet from the United States, except perhaps in the case of aboriginal title, because the aboriginals were here before the United States or Canada was, before the forty-ninth parallel meant anything more than another widening in the trees. I am struck by the words of Robert Frost when speaking of Americans, Canadians, people who came late to this continent. He said:

The land was ours before we were the lands.

Mr. Frost was speaking of the white population, not the natives. The land of this continent belonged to, was used by, the original people well before the concept of land took root as something that was possessed and parcelled out. Land, to the natives, was where you lived, where you worked and where you took your nature. It was heritage, not just territory. In a very real sense, land and people were the same.

We took that away, we who came later. We took it away as an inevitable consequence of our civilization and the compensation we offered was often meagre, often mean, sometimes nothing at all. But the original people were here before our civilization. Our treatment, our meagre, mean treatment of them, has increased our obligation, not diminished it.

We cannot reverse history, but we can take account of it. A minimum step must be for this Parliament to put in a document that deals with the rights of our people and to acknowledge at least the particular rights of our first people to draw their life and their culture from what we made our land.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Clark: I would like to discuss a third amendment we want to move. It is said that under no circumstances will the present Premier of Quebec accept the constitutional agreement. Whether or not this is true, it is significant that in April, the Government of Quebec, together with the premiers of seven other provinces, signed a very important constitutional agreement, namely the April accord, which basically contained the Vancouver amending formula we are discussing in the House today. So, in April, Quebec took the extraordinary step of giving up its veto right, yes, its veto right, thereby agreeing that the constitution could be changed without its consent. Quebec did not give up its veto right for nothing. It was offered in exchange for a reasonable guarantee of fiscal compensation for provinces who choose to opt out, that is, who decide not to go along with a constitutional amendment. It is common knowledge that this guarantee of full fiscal compensation was the only reason why Quebec signed the accord. It was also common knowledge that if the guarantee were withdrawn, Quebec would reject the accord, so that taking this compensation out of the accord was tantamount to forcing

The Constitution

Quebec to withdraw. At this point I do not care who deleted the compensation clause, but whoever is responsible did, in fact, force Quebec's hand. I do, however, want to rebuild this agreement, and it makes sense to start with the guarantee that has always been the essential condition for Quebec's participation, the full compensation guarantee. That is why I feel that compensation is the crucial factor, for all of us who hope to produce an agreement that all the provinces, including Quebec, will agree to sign. It must be said, to the federal government's credit, that it has gone part of the way; it has offered compensation with respect to certain provincial powers, namely, those concerning education and other cultural matters. However, this is only part of the guarantee, it is less than the guarantee in the April accord.

● (1440)

[English]

If we want a truly Canadian agreement with all partners participating, we must offer everything in November that was offered in April; and if the government of Quebec says no today to something it accepted in April, then it stands accused by its own actions of putting its *indépendantiste* ideology ahead of the interests of the people of Quebec.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker and colleagues in this House of Commons, colleagues who want to have a Constitution and an accord to which all of our people can be party, let us give it the choice. Indeed, if you will, let us force the government of the province of Quebec to make that choice. Let us force it to justify rejecting in November what it accepted in April.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The present resolution does not do that. The present resolution allows the PQ government of Quebec to take an easy way out, to say it had more in April than it has in November. Why not take that argument away from Quebec? Why give it that argument which it can use, if that is its desire, to stay out of the constitutional accord? Why not force it to make the choice? The only way to force it is by making in November the same offer the government of Quebec signed in April. That seems to me to be elemental logic. That seems to me to be a very effective way of seeing exactly where the Parti Québécois government does stand, and of seeing whether there is an opportunity for this Parliament to act in a way which will bring Quebec in and serve the interests of the people of Quebec.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: We are seized here not simply with the question of giving the government of Quebec a choice and forcing it to face it; we are also dealing here with the opportunity to give Canada the chance of an agreement in which all partners can join. To give Canada a chance, as I have indicated, we will