

*The Constitution*

population both homogeneous, because it lives in Outremont, and heterogeneous, because they each have their own cultures and personalities. A few months ago, I asked my constituents to fill out the questionnaire included in the newsletter I sent out. We then compiled the results and published them in a subsequent newsletter. I intend to submit these results and this whole file to the committee, as many of my colleagues have done.

Besides the questionnaires and the formal and informal meetings, there were our daily contacts with all these interesting people which stimulate the debate at all levels—intellectual, financial as well as emotional. I will try and summarize this for you in the few minutes I have left, but I will submit in writing the position that ensues.

I suggest that this debate is part of a necessary and very healthy process toward shaping the future of our country. Again, I thank you for this opportunity to express my views on this issue, to speak on behalf of the community so that we can do our share in looking for a solution to this problem that concerns all Canadians. I will not have time to get into the whole issue of the Constitution. I would need several hours to deal with the various aspects we have to consider when we think of the future of Canada. So I will merely raise specific points, including the cultural issue and the concept of a distinct society. And I may occasionally make use of information and briefs we received from a number of associations and individuals at the committee on communications and culture.

Finally, it can be said that culture is expressed by how one thinks and how one lives, how one senses and approaches reality. It would be a combination of what people in a certain area see as their history and what they reflect in their behaviour. This culture, which is constantly evolving while maintaining certain basic givens, reinforces sets of values and causes a whole society to reach certain heights of achievement. We can say that all the elements of our cultural values will affect the values and cultural manifestations of others. French speaking Canadians are not French, any more than English speaking Canadians are American or English. We are Canadians, with our own identity, and hence our similarities and differences. And that is what we must protect, share and develop.

We must also realize, that economics exist as an extension of culture, since the relationship between economics and culture is not one of equals.

We have examples across the world that show us that countries value their identity and sense of belonging before they value economics. Great Britain is unwilling to adopt a common currency because it believes that in so doing, it would adversely affect its culture and way of life.

Quebec's society has always seen itself as being distinct. The desire for recognition has always been there. However, I think it is time to get rid of the idea that being distinct means being superior. Nothing could be further from the truth. Distinct means there is a difference. It means a desire to be accepted for what one is, with one's strengths and weaknesses. In fact, Madam Speaker, feminist movements have always asked for women to be recognized as distinct from but equal to men. The same applies to aboriginal people. I think that soon we should stop talking and be reconciled with reality, which is beckoning.

Before changing the subject, I would like to add that the influence of different cultures actually reinforces our own identity, and this paradox is even more astonishing in our present world of instantaneous communication. On one hand, one must recognize the unity of the nation, which must have a certain size to be able to exist and trade with other nations in a satisfactory, profitable way that does not unduly call into question the various aspects of its national identity. On the other, the critical mass of the smaller groups that make up the larger whole must be preserved so that they are not assimilated to the detriment of the various regional entities.

That being said, I will touch on a few points in the time I have left. When the government tabled its proposals on September 24, 1991, at the same time it invited all Canadians to contribute to a real political renewal of their country.

The government has indicated many times that the proposals are a starting point. However, they are all interesting approaches to building a better Canada that will let us achieve our common goals while respecting our diversity.

Canadians' identity and values are at the forefront of the constitutional proposals. We plan to add to the beginning of the Constitution a Canada clause which would define us as Canadians and set forth our common aspirations and values, especially the respect for diversity