

Constitution Amendment, 1987

North. I too would like to pose a question to the Hon. Member who states that by the 1986 Census, he has ascertained there are some 50,900 people in the Northwest Territories and 22,800 people in the Yukon. Does he base the desire for provincehood in the North on population?

Certainly he could not ask the Canadian public to consider allowing 22,000 people to form a province. We have cities with 22,000 people, though surrounded by not quite as vast an area. But what really is important, is it not, is the number of people who should play an important part in deciding whether a part of Canada that is now a territory becomes a province?

Seriously, what will the Northwest Territories lose? We have a Member here who represents maybe 25,000 people. By the standards of the rest of Canada, they are over-represented. I think I represent some 79,000 people.

The Territories certainly are not losing in that regard. A Deputy Prime Minister was from the Territories. Senators have been from the Territories. I do not think any of this will be discontinued. The Hon. Member could become the Deputy Prime Minister, he could become the Prime Minister, representing only 25,000 people. Certainly it does not look like those people will be worse off because we brought Quebec into the fold.

My question is, quite frankly, does the Hon. Member think that the rest of Canada views the possibility of a province without any increase in population as even a distinct possibility, or should we not consider that? Does he think, if the time came that the population might possibly double in the next 50 years, that the rest of Canada would not give the North a fair hearing? It gave Manitoba one when it joined. And, of course, as recently as 1949 when Newfoundland joined as a province, it was given a fair hearing.

Certainly I think the Hon. Member has to see that the rest of the provinces, when they joined, were treated fairly and squarely and with a great deal of thought. I pose this question to my colleague and wonder if he would like to respond.

Mr. Nickerson: Mr. Speaker, it is a very interesting hypothesis, tying democratic and human rights to the numbers of population. Let me answer it very quickly and very simply. When Manitoba became a province, it had a population of 12,000 people.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The time for questions and comments has now expired. Debate. The Hon. Member for Saint-Léonard—Anjou (Mr. Gagliano).

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard—Anjou): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to take part in this very important debate this morning. First I should like to say that on June 3, 1987 the Prime Minister and the ten provincial premiers reached agreement on the amendment to the Constitution. All this, Mr. Speaker, based on the five conditions set by the

Government of Quebec for ratifying a Constitution it did not sign in 1982, although legally it was still part of it.

• (1150)

First of all, for the benefit of the House and all those listening to us now, I would like to read the five demands made by Quebec, because we must not forget that the most important aspect of this Accord was to bring Quebec within the constitutional family. The five conditions the Quebec Liberal Party put before Quebec voters in 1985, and on which it was elected, were the same as these demands, which are as follows: explicit recognition of Quebec as a distinct society; a guarantee to extend Quebec's powers with respect to immigration; revision of the constitutional amending formula, so as to recognize veto rights for Quebec; Quebec's participation in appointing judges to the Supreme Court of Canada and restrictions on the federal Government's spending powers.

Mr. Speaker, the first item, which I think received most of the criticism from those opposed to the Accord, deals with Quebec as a distinct society. Although I admit I am not a constitutional expert—I am only an accountant and not a lawyer, and lawyers with respect, seem to be the experts in this field,—I must inform the House that to me, the fact that the Accord says Quebec is a distinct society adds nothing to what Quebec already is. We are merely acknowledging a fact. We often hear people say: I did not come to Quebec or to Ontario, I came to Canada. That is quite true. In 1958, I came to Canada. Perhaps it is Canada's fault for not explaining to the people who come to this country about its geography, its history and its Constitution. I admit, Mr. Speaker, that it would be a very difficult task. However, the fact remains that those who come to Canada for the first time arrive in Canada and not in the provinces. Once they are in Canada, Mr. Speaker, they settle in one of the provinces, in towns and villages. They stay, and they are free to move wherever they want.

A person arriving in Quebec might go on to Ontario, British Columbia. However, the majority, and I would say the vast majority, stayed in Quebec, and we are now part of this distinct society. I stayed in Quebec, and I grew up in Quebec. I started a family in Quebec, I feel comfortable there, and I like living in Quebec. Mr. Speaker, I could also say that as a Canadian Quebecer, I feel different, and I do not see why my Canadian colleagues across this country should feel frustrated because we are recognizing this difference in Quebec.

First of all, Quebec is the only province where more than 80 percent of the population speaks French. They have a French culture. No other province in Canada has those characteristics. Second, Quebec is still the only province that has the Civil Code. Even for the appointment of Senators, Quebec does things somewhat differently from what other provinces do. A Senator must not only reside in the province where he is appointed, but he must also own some property there.