

Constitution Amendment, 1987

the ethnocultural reality of Canada. There have been some major oversights when it comes to the area of the ethnocultural reality as a fundamental characteristic of Canada. I reflect that with a heritage from Norway. Yet we have the feeling that while we recognize the advances made by the Accord and the Constitution in terms of reflecting the various fundamental characteristics of our country, the ethnocultural reality has yet to be addressed.

We must address the future of the overriding part of the Charter. Section 33 certainly ought to be reviewed, especially when it comes to minority rights. We all feel that any discrimination on the basis of sex, colour, or ethnicity ought not to be the subject of an override. Again, much work must be done in this area.

Finally, in terms of identifying concerns, we certainly must identify the process as a major concern. We have been rushed in terms of dealing with this matter. Canadians feel that they have been left out. I would only hope that future changes to the Constitution will not be left only to First Ministers, Members of Parliament, MLAs, MNAs, and MPPs, but in fact to the people of Canada as well. It is for that reason the committee suggested that a joint House of Commons and Senate committee should exist on an ongoing basis to hold hearings across the country so that suggestions could be made on constitutional changes in the future, including changes to the Senate, changes to the rights of aboriginal peoples, changes to the equality rights of all groups, and so on. Someone must do it in an ongoing way which involves more people than were involved in the last round.

● (1600)

We all feel uncomfortable with the process, but it is history now. We must get on with dealing with the future. While we have concerns about some of the shortcomings of the Meech Lake Accord, on balance we believe that it is a major step forward. We want a commitment to constitutional change in the future which involves all Canadians.

I believe that a very important page in the constitutional history book of Canada is about to be turned.

Mrs. Finestone: Madam Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague and friend. He is prepared to say "let Quebec sign on now and we will fix it later", if I heard him correctly. I also heard a series of real concerns in his comments in respect of the Northwest Territories and aboriginal peoples. He also talked about equality.

We are talking about nation-building, and it is predicated upon linguistic duality as a fundamental aspect of Canada. I am sure the Hon. Member is well aware of the article in which it is indicated that the rights of English-speaking Quebecers may be eroded in some significant fashion.

As the Hon. Member does not live in Quebec and is not an English-speaking Quebecer, I wonder whether he gave some

thought to how, where, and in what way he might be able to define "significant", "may", or "erode".

It may be too late to fix that if we do not do something about having a sense that this is a true, egregious error. One cannot have an imbalance on one scale. If one is part of a linguistic duality of a country, and there is a potential for erosion of rights, then there is not fairness across the land, according to the analysis of the committee.

Turning to whether we can fix it later—and my hon. colleague says that we should sign them on right now—is he aware that point nine amends Section 40? Section 40 allowed for compensation of provincial legislative powers when they related to educational and cultural matters. Now, with the amendment, it will allow such compensation for any transfer of legislative powers. Is the Hon. Member not concerned about the implications of that transfer of legislative powers and compensation?

Does the Hon. Member believe that it is important for English Quebecers to have the same rights and for minorities to have the same rights, and that they can be protected adequately without the total Charter being alluded to as on an equal footing with Clause 2?

Mr. Riis: Madam Speaker, those are very thoughtful questions. I suspect that I will not respond as thoroughly as the Hon. Member would like. However, let me do my best to say a few things at least.

Regarding the matter of fixing the Constitution and fixing the Accord, it is important that we view this process as a major step forward in terms of the recognition of Quebec and the role of Quebec and the recognition of our linguistic duality. It is not so much that we "fix" things but that we recognize some of the shortcomings with which we must deal in the future.

I notice that the committee placed a great deal of emphasis upon recommending how this would be accomplished in the future in terms of the process to ensure that some of the concerns the Hon. Member has raised would be addressed.

I recall the committee recommended that one of the first items the First Ministers might address when they come together again is not only to preserve the linguistic duality, which is part of the Accord, but to promote it.

According to my recollection, the transcripts of the hearings included a number of points that people made regarding the fact that it was important that it be promoted, not only preserved in terms of the *status quo*.

While I am not from Quebec, one of the surprising elements of the process—quite frankly, it amazed me and gave me a great deal of encouragement in terms of supporting the Accord—was the position of the Premier of British Columbia. Some of us might recall some of the views he held not long ago in terms of complaining about the fact that there was some French on his corn flakes boxes in the morning which aggravated him. He was involved in some editorial cartoons