

If a Liberal Government had been negotiating constitutional change with the provinces, that resolution would have been our basic negotiating position. In contrast, the arrangement negotiated by the Conservative Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) has a number of flaws which, in my view, should be corrected before the resolution is adopted.

The Government has refused to accept any amendments, allegedly because of fear the agreement will unravel. This attitude shows a great lack of faith in the Members of this House, in the provincial Premiers, and, indeed, in the people of Canada.

A full and open debate can only strengthen the Accord. The joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons which sat prior to the patriation of the Constitution in 1982 held public hearings for a year. This Government allowed only a matter of weeks for the joint committee to hold hearings and refused to allow any hearings outside Ottawa.

Referring to the amendments which my Party proposes now, first we want to include as fundamental characteristics of Canada the recognition of our aboriginal peoples, the recognition of the multicultural mosaic of Canada, the recognition of the regional identities, and the advantages of lower trade barriers between provinces.

We want to offer more protection for official language minorities by ensuring that Parliament is responsible for promoting, as well as maintaining, official minority language rights.

We would also like to see a firm commitment that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms takes precedence, in order that the basic rights and freedoms of Canadians are not diminished in any way by possible conflicts with other clauses in the Accord.

We believe in an elected Senate, and our proposal would accelerate the move from an appointed Senate to an elected Senate by electing Senators now when vacancies occur rather than appointing them based on provincial lists.

Also, our amendment concerning the Senate would recognize the right of the citizens of Yukon and Northwest Territories to senatorial election, because the current Accord before us leaves a gap in that Canadians living north of the 60th parallel would not be entitled to any future representation or appointment to the Senate.

These are responsible and reasonable amendments which meet the concerns of women, of aboriginal peoples, and of Canadians whose first language is neither English nor French. Representatives of these interests all made very moving presentations before the joint committee, but unfortunately their words fell on deaf ears, as the Conservative majority refused to consider any amendments.

If the Government had been prepared to accept these amendments, the resolution before us would have been strengthened, and the joy we all feel at Quebec's accession

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would not have been marred by our awareness that many thoughtful Canadians are uneasy about the unseemly haste and the undemocratic manner in which the issue has been handled.

Prior to the 1980 referendum, Liberals undertook to the people of Quebec that their vote for Canada would be followed by a commitment on our part to renew federalism. The motion before us today goes part way to meeting that commitment, and therefore I must vote for it. However, I wish the Government had been prepared to take the time and trouble to get it right now, instead of leaving it to future Governments to bring about a real consensus.

Hon. David Crombie (Secretary of State): Madam Speaker, I suppose today is a day of historic debate and historic happenings. I am very pleased to be able to participate in the debate in respect of the so-called Meech Lake Accord, in particular the debate on the report of the Special Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on the 1987 Constitutional Accord.

I, like a number of Members of the House, have had an opportunity to read the report. For those people who have not yet had an opportunity to read it, I commend it to them. It is very well written in an extremely balanced manner. The co-chairmen of the committee, Senator Arthur Tremblay and the Hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Speyer), did an outstanding job both in terms of the conduct of the committee and the report.

The report itself carries with it an uncommon amount of agreement and support, because not only was there a process where people came before the committee and offered their views and their briefs, but, most important, standing behind the process of the committee was an historic event, that is, a continuation of the understanding of the role of Quebec in Canada. That is what the Accord is about, I might say.

Much of the public discussion has dealt with other important matters, but sometimes we have forgotten in the debate that the Accord is about the role of Quebec. There is no issue in Canadian politics over 200 years which has occupied our time more than this. Indeed, there is no chapter in Canadian history which does not include in it, as it turns the page, a new understanding or a refined understanding of the role of Quebec in the Canadian family.

From 1760 to 1763, to the Quebec Act of 1774, to the constitutional Act of 1791, to the implementation of the Durham report in 1840, and to the British North America Act of 1867, each one of those parts of Canadian history carried with it an understanding of the role of Quebec. I do not want us to misunderstand, therefore, the purpose of the Accord. It is to deal specifically with the role of Quebec in the 21st century in Canada.

In our own time that debate began with the so-called Quiet Revolution of 1960. We were treated in the 1960s and 1970s to new phrases to try to capture the question of the day—what