

Government Orders

What were the fundamental objectives being pursued in this attempt at national reconciliation? Others may have different views and perhaps in the course of the debate we will hear them, but on February 12, 1991, in an address to the Canadian and Empire Clubs of Toronto, I as Prime Minister of Canada set out my own views with regard to the objectives we ought to pursue.

We must deal with the sense of powerlessness in the west and disparity in the Atlantic. We must listen to the concerns of the north and the voices of our aboriginal peoples. We must seek to understand the growing feeling of frustration of many Ontarians whose contribution to Canada is rarely recognized. We must find a way to ensure that Quebecers whose special character so enriches the distinctiveness of our national life become willing and enthusiastic partners in Canada.

[Translation]

I believe those sentiments now find voice in the document I have tabled here today.

As Prime Minister of Canada, it was my responsibility to preside over the nine full days of deliberations of first ministers and territorial and aboriginal leaders in August 1992, which concluded in Charlottetown on August 28. The provincial, territorial and aboriginal leaders came together then in a spirit of shared responsibility for the future well-being of this country and of its people. There was a common determination to rise above political philosophies, regional interests, or partisan considerations. We all felt that the peoples who make up Canada are stronger together than any of them could possibly be apart. Each of the partners in Confederation strengthens the whole, and each of those partners is stronger and greater by being part of a stronger and greater union. This concept has stood the test of time. It has made possible the Canada we know and cherish today: a nation that enshrined duality and diversity in 1867 and that embraced multiculturalism many generations later, making it a way of life; a federation committed to regional development as well as to national development, to equalization of opportunity as well as to economic prosperity for all its citizens.

[English]

Let us consider briefly what is contained in the agreement that is now before us and that will be shortly submitted to the Canadian people. For the aboriginal peoples there is simple justice, long overdue, through the recognition in the Constitution of Canada of their inherent right to self-government. It proposes a new partnership in a federation that was created in 1867 without their participation.

This generation of Canadians and as a result their political leaders are now called upon in this Parliament of Canada to redeem the promises of equality first made to the aboriginal peoples several hundred years ago by the representatives of French and English kings and never fulfilled. We propose to fulfil those obligations to the aboriginal peoples in the year 1992.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mulroney: By reforming our Senate to make it equal, elected and effective we are I think responding to a strongly held and legitimate view in western Canada generally and Alberta in particular, as well as in smaller provinces, that our second Chamber must not be the rubber stamp of the majority in the House and must be able to express the sense of legislative independence and true partnership that gave rise to the Canadian federation itself.

This is a provision that deals with the nature of Parliament itself. It is an idea that was advanced for a good number of years in difficult times by the premier of Alberta, the Hon. Don Getty, and he was then supported by others as time went on: the premier of Manitoba, the premier of Newfoundland and others.

It has resulted in a fundamental change and I think a beneficial change to the Parliament of Canada. I think it is appropriate on an occasion like today that I ask all members to join with me in paying tribute to the individual whose devotion to this concept made it possible, the Hon. Don Getty.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mulroney: The Canada clause will enshrine the fundamental characteristics of our political and economic union, our attachment to a parliamentary and federal system, the rule of law, the rights of our native peoples, the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society, the vitality and development of minority language rights, racial and ethnic equality, respect of individual and