

• (1955)

People were able to express themselves, as is the case every three of four years; they were able to tell us about their concerns, their fears, their needs, as well as their concerns and their objectives.

I was really surprised to hear the people from the riding of Roberval, whom I knew well since I represented them twice in the Quebec National Assembly say how disappointed they were to see that, after nine years of a government whose mandate was coming to an end, the basic issues of the election campaign were essentially the same as those of the 1984 campaign. This was both surprising and disappointing for the people who listen to us, and it explains in part the lack of confidence and the lack of interest regarding politicians in our society.

People were disappointed because in the 1984 election campaign, the Progressive Conservative Party had pledged to eliminate or reduce the deficit. At that time, politicians travelled to every riding to ask their fellow Canadians to support them, and more importantly to promise them that the deficit would, from then on, be under control. I must point out here that this deficit was totally generated by the Liberal government.

Job creation was another priority during that election campaign, the 1984 campaign. Politicians of this country travelled everywhere to promise Canadians that the problem of unemployment would be solved, adding that it was unacceptable for a society such as ours to have an unemployment rate of about 20 per cent in several regions. This was a promise. What is the situation nine years later? The situation is the same. If anything, it is worse than before.

During the 1984 campaign, a commitment was also made whereby the constitutional problems would be solved, especially for Quebec where this is a very sensitive issue. We were told that a federalist party sitting in Ottawa would once and for all solve the constitutional problems and erase the unspeakable insult made to Quebec in 1982. Earlier this afternoon, the Leader of the Opposition alluded to this episode. Quebecers felt they have been betrayed by unspeakable political acts which took place in Canada in 1982, 1984, 1988, and up to the present.

After nine years of promises, nine years of hopes, the election campaign was dominated by the same themes. Our senders debt not only has not been contained, it has tripled, in spite of all promises; the rate of unemployment is at least as high as it was in 1984, or nine years later, in spite of all promises. And last, but not least, there is a constitutional saga that deserves closer scrutiny. Years of discussions, exchanges, a deal, the Meech Lake Agreement, an agreement that essentially could have satisfied a certain number of Quebecers. For the main part, the Meech Lake Accord contained conditions which seemed acceptable to a relatively large segment of the population of Quebec. But what happened? Meech Lake was rejected. Several months, several years of discussions, compromises, exchanges, fragile

The Address

agreements were rejected, as we have seen, even if they gave some hope for the future of Canada.

• (2000)

Some of our colleagues on the other side, whose ideas I respect, of course, will say that Canada is a great country, a country where we should enjoy living, where we should feel comfortable. But whatever people might say, let us not forget that, in 1982, this country let us down, and this country rejected Meech Lake which represented a giant step on the constitutional scene.

Now we come to another discussion, another compromise, the Charlottetown Agreement, the substance of which seemed unacceptable even to Quebecers. Quebecers said no to this Agreement because it did not take into account their basic traditional demands, while English Canada rejected it because it apparently made too many concessions to Quebec.

It is very sad indeed to look at how political negotiations unfolded under the previous government. Our political formation was born of the desire of Quebecers to express themselves through the democratic process, to elect to the Canadian Parliament men and women who would convey the message that had been circulating at home for years and which deserved to be expressed here, to be shared during debates like this one, to be the core of our exchanges and discussions and, maybe, eventually, of our mutual understanding.

The Bloc Quebecois has received extraordinary support from a majority of Quebecers. We are 54 here today, 54 members of Parliament who have a job to do, who have the mission to see to it that this message is, for once, given to the federal Parliament without being filtered or distorted on the way by those who refuse to say it as it is felt back home.

We are here to make Parliament work. I want to reassure my colleagues. Many things have been said about the arrival of the Bloc in Ottawa. Never during the election campaign did we mention that we intended to paralyse Parliament, to prevent it from doing its job, to prevent it from dealing with the real problems facing Canadians. After our first day here, my colleagues and I are happy to show our interest for this institution and our profound respect for democracy. We are happy to tell all those who were worried about our coming here that we will co-operate. We will help find solutions to the terrible problems facing our society.

The whole political context that brought us here is set against a dreadful economic background. The government implemented a monetary policy that created unemployment, a monetary policy that was aimed essentially at maintaining a low inflation rate in Canada without paying any attention to the unemployment it brought. The economic crisis was made even worse by the signing of a free trade agreement, when industry had not been prepared for the deep changes so badly needed in the context of a broader economy. The free trade agreement was