

Government Orders

Official Languages says that in the documents submitted to him this represents a net gain for linguistic minorities—the English-speaking minority in the province of Quebec, and French-speaking minorities elsewhere. That is what we sought to do.

I was honoured by the fact that one of the most important observers in Canada's national life agreed and stipulated very clearly that this was a net gain for all of Canada's linguistic minorities. Its ratification is the best guarantee that minority language communities will flourish in Canada.

Ten provincial premiers representing four different political parties from British Columbia to Newfoundland and Labrador supported the Accord. All three federal leaders in the House of Commons strongly endorsed it. In politics in Canada this is about as close as you are ever going to come to a miracle, Mr. Speaker.

The Meech Lake Accord was inspired by the same insight and realism which motivated Sir John A. and Sir George-Étienne Cartier a century ago. "We are a great country", Sir John said, "and shall become one of the greatest in the universe if we preserve it; we shall sink into insignificance and adversity if we suffer it to be broken".

[*Translation*]

Here is what Georges-Étienne Cartier said about the 1867 Constitution. Some time later, Cartier said, "I hope that if this grand project of Confederation must be amended, it will not be to narrow the principles of fairness on which it is founded, but rather to enlarge them even more."

Ratification of the Meech Lake Accord will allow us to address an agenda of importance to all Canadians: Senate reform, aboriginal rights, minority language rights and improving the Charter. Those are critical matters for all governments and all legislators to consider as we approach the June deadline for ratifying the Accord.

Some would say, Mr. Speaker, that we have come a long way since 1867, and we have, certainly. But in my view, all the reforms we have instituted in the past quarter century do no more than ensure that the concept of partnership is brought up to date with changing times and circumstances.

Without such reforms, the splendid concept, the uniquely Canadian concept, could wither and die, and with it the essence of Canada and the core of Canadian values.

[*English*]

Twenty-five years ago today a new Canadian flag was raised for the first time on Parliament Hill after a long, raucous and emotional debate across the nation and in this House of Commons. The flag too, as some members will recall, was the subject of very substantial and prolonged disagreement and, indeed, division.

Many felt strongly that the red maple leaf was not the right flag for Canada. But 25 years later every single Canadian rejoices in our flag's distinctiveness. It is celebrated as perhaps our most important symbol of unity. There is not a single Canadian who has travelled across this country or elsewhere in the world who on seeing the Canadian maple leaf flag flying does not look at it with pride and joy and says: "There is our flag and I am a Canadian."

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: So may it be some day with the Meech Lake Accord and documents designed to unite Canada to bring us together to make sure that the vision of the Fathers of Confederation is respected and honoured and that this country becomes effectively what it was always designed to be—one Canada.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

The breathtaking pace of international events, the tremendous development of technology and the vast trade opportunities opening up in the world urgently remind us that we cannot condemn another generation to sterile and interminable domestic quarrels.

We have had our fill of constitutional conferences!

[*English*]

We are the international experts in the cottage industry of commas, colons, paragraphs, notwithstanding and constitutions. We could give advice to anyone in the world on how to do it, but unfortunately we have not completed it ourselves.

I think Canadians call upon us in the same spirit of openness and generosity to recognize those values that moved the Fathers of Confederation and who look at us today, 125 years later and say: "Surely the time has come". That is said in the context of the continual respect of that individuality of which Macdonald spoke in 1865, of the respect for minority rights which has now extended to respect for all minorities across the country, respect for bilingualism and the tremendous value, the