

On May 20, 1980, during the Referendum, Quebecers pledged their trust in renewed federalism. However, this was followed by the patriation of the Constitution on April 17, 1982, without the signature of the Premier of Quebec.

Communications between Quebec and English Canada had broken down. It became essential to reopen the dialogue and start a process of national reconciliation.

This reconciliation, which was mentioned several times earlier today in connection with the Riel motion, reconciliation "with honour and enthusiasm", was the prime objective of the present Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

Honourable senators, I think it was a serious mistake to kill Meech Lake. If the accord had been ratified, it would already have settled a number of major problems in connection with the renewal of Canadian federalism. Granted, it would have been imperfect in the eyes of some Canadians, but at least we would have made some progress.

**The Hon. the Speaker pro tempore:** Honourable senators, the senator has already exceeded his speaking time. Is it your pleasure to allow him to continue?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

• (1700)

[English]

**Hon. Royce Frith (Leader of the Opposition):** Leave is given, but not without noting that it is really becoming a little absurd to interrupt a speech like this because the 15 minutes has gone by. It is not as if we are so pressed for time that we cannot wait another five minutes for Senator David. I want it noted on the record so that when the committee deals with this matter, we can come up with something a little healthier than this 15 minute limit, which is absolutely absurd. What has happened is just another illustration of the absurdity. That being said, please continue, Senator David.

[Translation]

**Senator David:** Honourable senators, I thank you for allowing me to carry on. I need four or five more minutes. So we were saying that if the Meech Lake Accord had passed, we would have covered quite a bit of ground.

We would have been able to concentrate on the other aspects of a federalism adapted to the demands of this day and age.

Is it too soon for me to rejoice because more and more Canadians urge the government to recognize the specificity of the distinct society? I am reminded among others, of economist John McCallum who, in a moving appeal to Canadians from other provinces, urged them to recognize our distinct society. Alliance Quebec, in its submission to the Beaudoin-Dobbie Commission also said unequivocally that Quebec should be recognized as a distinct society. Very recently, at the conference in Toronto, we also noted the same positive attitude. Those stands come at an appropriate time because we have a rendez-vous with history and we will soon have to cut this Gordian knot. Like André Fontaine, the former director of the newspaper "Le Monde" wrote:

[Senator David]

*Each people inherited a past that has left too profound a mark to suddenly disregard it. The question now comes down to whether Canadians are interested in living in a country that recognizes a distinct society of 6 million people.*

However, the notion of distinct society seems to present a problem of interpretation. The word "distinct" itself seems to be a problem. Several people maintain that in English, the word "distinct" carries a connotation of superiority. I must admit that all my etymological research on that word has not enabled me to confirm that claim.

In my opinion, at least in Quebec, the notion of distinct society was never meant to refer to anything other than the feeling of being different that prevails since 1760.

We cannot deny our past and we do not have the right to jeopardize the future.

I hope that it is still possible for Quebec and Canada to reach a compromise. This will require a good dose of mutual understanding and acceptance of our differences.

But is it not our openmindedness, our tolerance and our respect for individuals that have made Canada the envy of the world? We have to continue to apply those principles. Time is of the essence. As we look to the Twenty-First century, the numerous challenges that Canada must face in every field compel us to react urgently with maturity, common sense, restraint, energy and optimism to the Constitutional amendments which, even if they are imperfect, would represent a tremendous step ahead for all Canadians.

In concluding, I want to thank Mr. Philippe Poulin whose research work has enabled the drafting of this speech, which is a summary of the work that we hope to present in the near future.

I thank you, honourable senators, for having listened to me with an open mind and, hopefully, with satisfaction.

**Hon. Gildas L. Molgat (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, will Senator David allow me to ask him a question?

**Senator David:** Yes, certainly.

**Senator Molgat:** Honourable senators, I was very interested in Senator David's presentation. Following your reasoning, what position do you take on Chief Ovide Mercredi's recent demand concerning the distinct society and native people? How do you see it?

**Senator David:** Honourable senators, look, I will tell you quite frankly that the native problem is so complex that I first wanted to find out what "distinct society" has meant throughout history to be sure that it was not interpreted differently today than it was 100, 150, 200 or 300 years ago.

I admit that I am not learned enough in history to answer your question correctly. It is clear in my mind that native people as a whole constitute a distinct society. That is common sense, I think. In my research, I wanted to determine as precisely as possible the historical facts before and after the Conquest that were recognized even by France, from which we