

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Friday, June 22, 1990.

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing the Honourable Government House Leader (Mr. McCrae), I would like to draw Honourable Members' attention to the gallery, where we have with us this morning from the Hochfeld Elementary School fifty Grades 5 to 8 students, and they are under the direction of Mr. Kehler. This school is located in the constituency of the Honourable Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Penner).

On behalf of all Honourable Members, I welcome you here this morning.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if there would be leave to move directly to Orders of the Day?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to move directly to Orders of the Day? Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT MOTION

Mr. Speaker: Constitutional Amendment Motion, third day of debate. On the proposed motion of the Honourable First Minister (Mr. Filmon), the Proposed Constitution Amendment, 1987, the Honourable Member for Churchill.

Mr. Jay Cowan (Churchill): Mr. Speaker, I have sat many years in this Chamber and over those years I have seen many things happen. At the same time, I have seen many things that we thought would happen not happen after all. Until the last few days, I do not believe that I have ever seen history being made in quite the same way as it is now happening to all of us.

It is with that sense of history that I take my place today to speak to those events in which we are all caught up. I do not intend to speak at any length, because I believe much of what I would want to say has already been said by people much more learned and much more eloquent than I. More importantly I do not believe that at this late date in the debate my words would change anyone's opinion. However, I do believe it to be important that each and every one of us take this opportunity as legislators to put our own positions before the Legislature. I believe that we owe that responsibility to history, so I will do that first.

* (1005)

Let me begin my explanation by clearly stating all my considerations on this issue and my ultimate

decision is based on one principle alone. That principle is a simple one. I will support that which I believe will make this country stronger and more united. I believe that the Meech Lake Accord is important to the unity of this country. I have come to that conclusion over a long period of time by listening to those who are most affected by the passage or the failure of this accord to pass.

I listened as best I could to the people of Quebec, through their Premier and through others who have spoken for Quebec, and I have heard them say that the Meech Lake Accord is important to them as a distinct society and to the future of their province within Canada. I believe those words to be sincere and I believe those words to be helpful. I can tell you that I support their objective of promoting and protecting their culture and their values through constitutional enshrinement of a distinct society clause, the concept of a distinct society, and I hope very much that they can accomplish that goal.

Like so many others, I have also tried to listen carefully to those who have concerns about the Meech Lake Accord and what it means to the future of this country, and they had made those concerns known from many different but equally legitimate perspectives. There are those who believe that certain provisions of the Meech Lake Accord will weaken Canada. Mr. Speaker, I cannot say that they are wrong. There are those who believe that there are other provisions of the Meech Lake Accord which will have negative effects, and I cannot say that they are wrong. I can tell you that I share many of their concerns, but I do not always share their conclusions.

I appreciate the serious questions about the spending power provisions of the Meech Lake Accord. I would like to see them changed so that we would have a strong federal Government that could put to use those strong federal powers to build the nation through a more equitable sharing of our collective wealth. I also share the concerns I have heard about unanimity and the fact that its requirement may very well hamper our ability and the ability of legislators across this country, in every province and in the federal Government, to give effect to positive change when that change is required to build a stronger Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard those concerns and like many others, I share them as concerns. Others have spoken to a number of other concerns as well, and I need not do so at this time. There will be lots of opportunity I believe for debate on this issue for a long time to follow. But I want to say today that I respect the sincerity, I respect the integrity, and I respect the strongly held feelings of those who oppose the passage of the Meech Lake Accord for those reasons. I respect them when they make their personal decisions, and they are all difficult decisions. No matter what side one finally falls on, they are all extremely difficult personal decisions. I respect the personal decisions of those

who decide not to support the accord, as I do respect those who decide to support the accord.

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I will not reject the Meech Lake Accord on the basis of those concerns about specific clauses. I acknowledge them to be serious problems, but in my mind they are not serious enough on balance to cause me to reject the entire accord and what I believe it to mean to the people of Quebec and therefore to the future of Canada. So I want very much, Mr. Speaker, for the Meech Lake Accord to pass despite those serious faults that are a part of the overall package.

I want it to pass because I believe it protects the legitimate aspirations of the Province of Quebec to promote its identity and its cultural values, and I believe that makes us a better country. If that were the only question at hand, it would be a much simpler matter than it has come to be, but there is a dilemma. You see, there is one other consideration which has not yet been reconciled. There is another distinct and fundamental characteristic of Canada that must also be recognized in the Constitution, and now is the time to do so.

* (1010)

I want the objectives of the Meech Lake Accord to come to pass so that we will have a more unified country, but it must not do so at the expense of Canada's aboriginal peoples. That situation brings us to the question of timing, an increasingly and more urgent concern as days go by. There are those who say, and I have listened to them carefully, that the second round is the right time to address the concerns of the aboriginal people of Canada. They say that, I believe, because they believe that the companion resolution will deal with those issues. I respect that opinion and I respect those words, but I have also listened to the aboriginal people who see it differently. I have heard them state that they cannot accept that assurance.

I have heard the aboriginal people state very clearly that they have heard those assurances before and that they have seen assurances forgotten oh so quickly after they have been made. They have seen promises broken to the extent where they can no longer trust the promise.

Throughout the centuries they have seen their honest, legitimate expectations unmet, so they have taken the stand they have. As this is a time that calls upon all of us to respect each other, we must all respect that decision and the struggle they have undertaken to make for a different, and I believe, a better future.

As I have listened to Quebec, as I have listened to Manitoba, and as I have listened to people across this country, so have I listened to the First Nations. Over the past few days I have listened very intently to what the MLA for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper) has had to say both inside and outside this House. I have spoken with him. I have spoken with many chiefs and their friends. I have shared my questions and my thoughts with them. I have listened to many of my other friends, both in my constituency and throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe this is a matter of a constituency-based issue, but I want to hear and I did

listen to what my constituents had to say. I believe our decisions have to go beyond our own constituencies and confront the dilemma that is facing the country at this time.

As I listened, aboriginal people, Canada's first peoples have told me that they have no argument at all with the aspirations of the people of Quebec to entrench their distinct identity in the Constitution of Canada. I believe them when they tell me that. At the same time aboriginal people say they believe that their own distinctness, their own fundamental characteristics and their own cultural values as aboriginal people, as the original peoples of Canada should be acknowledged in an equal fashion.

They have told me that if the Meech Lake Accord passes without their own distinctness and fundamental characteristics enshrined in that document, they are fearful that it will be harder in the future for them to gain that fair and just objective. They have told me that if that does happen, they will have been disregarded, ignored and disadvantaged one more time.

* (1015)

That is a dilemma. I cannot say that such is the case, but neither can I say that it is not. The simple fact is that despite all the projections and all the crystal ball gazing that we have heard people go through over the past little while when they addressed this matter of the accord and whether or not it will pass, nobody, nobody can say what will happen in any event.

I can tell you quite honestly that there is much about this entire issue, there is a tremendous amount about this subject, this whole matter, that I do not understand and that I do not think I will ever fully understand. I do not feel alone when I make that statement, because I think the uncertainties, the questions, the concerns are something that each and every one of us in this Chamber and in Chambers across this country and in the Parliament at the federal level share. We will never fully understand what is happening around us in this issue that is before us.

If that is indeed the case, if there is no logical progression that is infallible that leads you to a certain conclusion, then our job is to listen even more carefully and to seek and put to use the advice of others as they tell us what they believe, what they foresee, what they hope and what they fear will come out of this entire debate.

I think that is what all of us have tried to do in this Chamber over the past little while and in our constituencies as we watch this unfold. Just as I, using that principle of listening, just as I listened to Quebec on the question of their own future and of their own destiny, so must all of us listen to the aboriginal people on the issue of their future and their destiny. Therein lies the contradiction, the dilemma.

We have all grappled with this, we have all wrestled with this, we have all looked inside ourselves perhaps more so than we have ever done before, because the questions are so profound and the issues are so complex, to try and find the answers.

What I have heard other legislators say, as I have watched the debate unfold in other provinces, is that they are torn apart by this issue, that they do not have the answer to this issue, that they have no firm understanding of what it is that should be done and what they should be doing to make that happen.

I believe that is the reason in this Chamber in Manitoba, where the aboriginal issues are so much in the forefront, because we are faced with the choice between two goods, not two wrongs; between two rights, not two evils. We have to choose between what we believe to be good for the country and what we believe to be good for the aboriginal people, and it has torn us apart. It has caused us those sleepless nights and not just us as legislators; it has caused the country sleepless nights.

We are not the only ones that have grappled with this, but I guess if you have to choose between two goods, you cannot make the wrong choice. If there is any potential positive out of this, it is that we must all know that we cannot make the wrong choice; we just must make a choice. Either choice between those two goods has to be the appropriate one for each and every one of us, but there is still the contradiction; there is still the dilemma in making that choice.

I believe the aboriginal people's stand for fairness and for justice in the Constitution is a very necessary and a very just battle. Their grievances and the injustices they have suffered for so many years, so many decades, so many centuries, has long demanded both attention and resolution.

There is not any one of us in this Chamber or in Chambers across the country who have not in some way failed the aboriginal people over time with respect to those injustices and those issues. I believe there is not any one of us who has not tried to do what he could to solve the injustices and the grievances, so it is not failure for lack of wanting to do something.

* (1020)

Maybe this is another complex issue that demands time and patience and a bit more work and harder work, but the fact is at least now those issues are getting attention. At least now we are listening to the aboriginal people when they bring those grievances one more time before us.

I fervently hope that out of that listening will come the resolution that is demanded. I fervently hope that as a result of a courageous stand that the aboriginal people, through the MLA for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper), are taking to protect their historical rights and to build a better future for their people and their country will be resolved positively.

There has been much commentary and much discussion about the way in which that struggle has unfolded and the use of the rules in this House to ensure that the rights of not only the aboriginal people but the rights of the MLA for Rupertsland and the rights of all legislators are recognized and upheld.

Mr. Speaker, the rules are here to protect the rights of the minority. As legislators we know that to be the

case. From time to time we have all looked to the rules to protect ourselves and those whom we represent. Those who will sit in this Chamber in the future will do exactly the same thing. That is our right, but it goes beyond that. It is our responsibility.

Elijah Harper, the MLA for Rupertsland, has done nothing other than that which any Member would do under similar circumstances. Beyond that the MLA for Rupertsland could do nothing other than that which he has done. Not only does he have the moral authority to do so, but beyond that he has a moral imperative to do so. He could do nothing but take his stand when his people, when his history and when his heart demanded it. On every occasion that he did so we all noted that he did so with courage, with conviction and conscience and a quiet confidence from which each and every one of us could learn.

So no matter what the end result of these turbulent days, Elijah Harper will have accomplished much for the aboriginal people of Canada. His work and their victory will live on in their stories and in their collective consciousness as a significant turning point in a long and proud history. He has focused—indeed he has forced our attention on the needs of his people. With quiet dignity and an understated eloquence he has given voice to tens of thousands of aboriginal people who look to him to stand his ground and defend the future of their country.

It was not until yesterday as I stood among thousands of aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples to hear them speak to each other, to all of us and to the world that I finally realized that the dilemma about which I have spoken earlier in this speech and a contradiction which has been troubling all of us is now not as irreconcilable as I had originally thought it to be.

I listened once again to George Erasmus when he confirmed that the aboriginal people support the distinct society aspirations of the people of the Province of Quebec and in doing so he asked for the same support for their own distinct and their own fundamental characteristics from the people of Quebec, from the people of Canada. I listened to Phil Fontaine express again his desire for fairness, his desire for justice, his desire for equity for all aboriginal people.

* (1025)

I have listened to the MLA for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper) restate the objectives of the aboriginal people in his speech to this Legislature. The Meech Lake Accord does not accomplish those objectives, but that is not to say that it cannot. I believe that we all must make it do so if it is to be a just document. It is obvious that we are very late in the day and it is unlikely—I think I can say that with the agreement of most people here—that it will pass through this Legislature by the June 23 deadline, but despite the significance of that day the world does not come to an end on June 23.

What we must do now if we are to put our time to good use is to look beyond that date and to use our efforts to seek the justice that aboriginal people demand and deserve. What Elijah Harper has done is to give us a new opportunity to build upon that which has

already been accomplished in the present Meech Lake Accord and to make it an even better document, to finally make it a document with as much fairness and justice for the aboriginal people as it has for the Province of Quebec and the rest of the country.

I believe we now have a great opportunity even more so than we had before to unite and strengthen the country by treating the aboriginal people with respect, with equality, with fairness and with justice. The aboriginal people have told us that they believe that the Meech Lake Accord as presently constituted will weaken their treaty and aboriginal rights. We cannot strengthen this country by weakening the rights of any part of our country, especially by weakening the rights of the aboriginal peoples.

We will not achieve that goal of a more united Canada, of a truly unified Canada without strengthening all of our collective rights and we have not yet done that. I believe that we can still do so. I listened carefully to many people over the past few days and I have heard the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and I have heard the Prime Minister and I have heard my own Leader and I have heard the Leaders of the other Parties and I have heard the Premiers across the provinces, including the Premier of Quebec, say that they support aboriginal aspirations. So it is not that which is in Meech Lake that is the real problem; it is that which is not in Meech Lake that is now on this late date the real issue.

So the answer to the dilemma becomes that much more apparent. We must all continue to support the objectives of the Meech Lake Accord; and within that overall objective of a stronger and a more unified Canada, there must be fairness, justice and equality for the Province of Quebec and for the aboriginal people.

We have all learned much over the past few days. Two of the most significant concepts I believe we have learned is that of the power of patience and that of the importance of process. Now more than ever we need that patience. Now more than ever we need that process.

* (1030)

We must look beyond the arbitrariness of a specific time, a specific place and a specific date. It is not June 23 that is the issue here. It is the future of Canada. We must now put the bitterness of that debate behind us and not lock this country into a specific date that will invariably come and go. We must now look again to the future and begin anew to work together to build a more united and stronger Canada. It is to that goal that we must all recommit our efforts.

We must continue on with the purpose of the Meech Lake Accord, but we must do it better than we have done it in the past. This time the aboriginal people must be at the table. This time the aboriginal people must be heard. This time the distinctness and the fundamental characteristic of the aboriginal people must be recognized. We must all work together toward that goal and we must take guidance from the MLA for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper), from the chiefs of Manitoba and from the aboriginal leadership across this country.

We must not lose the opportunity with which they have presented us that indeed must result in a more fair and a better Meech Lake Accord.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe in destiny or fate. If I were to believe in it I could not ever imagine having come closer to it than being a part of what we have all witnessed here in this Chamber throughout the past week. In many ways we are being swept along by the events that are far beyond our control, and the best that we can do in those circumstances is to try not to lose our way, and try not to lose sight of our original objectives. If it is destiny, or if it is fate, or if it is history, or if it is just a highly unlikely combination of events that makes us rethink our plans and rechart our path, let us in any event do it as best we can within the context of our original goals.

Elijah Harper, the MLA for Rupertsland, has given us a chance to help shape that destiny a little bit better. In his speech yesterday he set out the agenda that we must all follow. His commentary on the plight of aboriginal peoples is not a new story. Every one of us has witnessed it, many first hand, many through the media, in other ways. We have all heard of it; it is not unfamiliar to any one of us here. We have heard it time and time again, but I am not certain that we have ever really heard it as we have heard it over the past week.

I know that we have never seen the anguish quite so close up as we have seen it over the last week. I guess the question that we must now all face is whether or not this time we are prepared to truly listen. I sincerely hope that we are. I sincerely hope that we will go beyond the mere act of listening to make a place at the constitutional table for the aboriginal people who for so long have been excluded so that they, so that we, so the Province of Quebec, so that all the other provinces in Canada can begin the very hard work that we all know needs now to be done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Harold Taylor (Wolseley): Merci beaucoup, M. le président. Je voudrais donner une partie de ma parole aujourd'hui en français, et la raison est que je suis un ancien citoyen de la belle province du Québec.

Et pour moi, le procès suivi pendant les trois dernières années est complètement incroyable, de voir une série de rendez-vous en privé, de n'avoir pas la voix du peuple de chaque région de ce pays, et de voir les compromis qui sont vraiment inacceptables pour une grande, grande partie de ce pays.

On peut voir les actions dans cette chambre de mon collègue immédiatement à ma gauche, le membre de Rupertsland, M. Harper, qui doit dire finalement pour son peuple, "Suffisant! Arrêtez! Le procès n'est pas correct." Et malheureusement, je dois conclure la même chose et dire que j'ai une affection pour M. Harper et pour son peuple, et pour la situation historique de la population native du Canada.

Je pense qu'il est très, très important pour le Québec d'accepter que la rejection de l'Accord du lac Meech n'est pas une situation où le reste du pays pousse le Québec hors du Canada. Mais malheureusement,

toujours avec la presse, la radio, la télévision au Québec, on écoute. Ce n'est pas la vérité. Ce n'est pas la vérité du tout.

L'on voit presque chaque soir avec les nouvelles de la télévision au Québec et particulièrement les émissions de la Société Radio-Canada, le regrettable incident à Brockville il y a huit mois où un drapeau québécois fut mis par terre et tout le monde d'un groupe extrémiste anglais marche sur ça. Ce n'est pas acceptable pour une grande partie du pays hors du Québec. Mais on doit, pour moi, se souvenir du nombre de fois que j'ai vu le drapeau canadien brûlé dans les rues, dans les plazas du Québec. L'on doit avoir une assez balance dans la presse, et je dois dire qu'il n'est pas responsable que les presses québécoises ont répété cette sorte de chose, cette sorte de petit incident et ne donne pas de la balance, la vérité, la situation réelle au Canada anglais.

Je dois me rappeler de bons souvenirs concernant le Québec. J'ai passé presque vingt-deux ans là.

J'étais assez petit quand ma famille a déménagé là de Vancouver. Nous sommes vraiment une famille très anglaise. Nous n'avons pas beaucoup de français, mes parents; et ma soeur et moi, ne sommes pas entrés dans le système d'écoles à ce moment.

Mais, ma famille a trouvé que la province était certainement intéressante, certainement historique et avait beaucoup de choses à faire, mais il y a une vraie chaleur là . . . une vraie chaleur. L'hospitalité du Canadien-français est vraiment incroyable. Nous avons de très bons souvenirs de ça.

J'ai décidé après avoir pris mon éducation primaire, secondaire et universitaire à Montréal, de travailler avec le gouvernement fédéral et malheureusement pour moi, c'était nécessaire de déménager autour du pays.

Mes parents ont décidé de ne pas quitter le Québec et de ne pas déménager au grand Ouest, décidé de maintenir leurs amis dans la Colombie britannique et de maintenir leur domicile au Québec. Ils restent là en retraite.

C'est mon intention de retourner à la belle province. Malheureusement, un petit délai personnel, parce que j'avais l'intention d'être là pour les fêtes nationales ce dimanche. Mais à cause du débat ici, dans la chambre législative au Manitoba, c'est nécessaire d'avoir un départ un peu en retard.

* (1040)

J'ai aussi des souvenirs du traitement de la minorité anglaise au Québec. Je dois dire que le traitement de cette minorité est très, très bon. Pour moi, et je pense, pour la plupart de cette minorité le traitement il y a de nombreuses années était complètement acceptable et c'est un but pour le traitement des minorités françaises hors du Québec. Je pourrais dire que le gouvernement ici au Manitoba doit avoir le courage d'offrir les services, les programmes par le gouvernement comme un droit dans cette province exactement comme au Québec.

Mais je dois aussi dire avec certaines réservations parce que depuis 1966, ils y a eu certains changements

d'attitude dans la province du Québec concernant sa minorité. Pour moi, la chose qui change c'est un amendement de la loi concernant les signes bilingues pour les voies du Québec. À ce moment-là, immédiatement avant l'Expo '67, il y a eu un commencement de changer les signes bilingues pour toutes les routes du Québec. Ceci n'était pas un effort positif et vraiment il y a aussi un certain concernement de sécurité des chauffeurs et leurs passagers.

C'est intéressant, qu'il y a une semaine j'ai lu un article dans un journal qui indiquait qu'il y a une étude au Québec exactement pour vérifier s'il y a des problèmes avec la sécurité des chauffeurs et des passagers sur les routes du Québec.

Et les conclusions ne sont pas définies. Quelques personnes dans la communauté disent oui, et quelques autres disent non. C'est intéressant après vingt-quatre ans que l'on discute cette sorte de chose, et il n'y a pas une vraie réponse.

C'était un peu comme le Canada, vraiment ça. Ce n'est pas une très grande chose, mais c'est un petit symbole de la même sorte de problème que vous avez entre les autres parties du Canada et le Québec. On discute toujours et je pense que c'est la même chose pendant le dernier siècle, il y a des problèmes entre les régions du Canada, entre les deux langues officielles et c'était vraiment ça avant la création du Canada.

L'on doit se souvenir des insurrections en Ontario et aussi au Québec pendant l'année 1837-38. Les mêmes sortes de problèmes probablement pour un pays comme le Canada qui a deux langues officielles et maintenant plusieurs cultures. C'est probablement l'avenir pour nous d'avoir des disputes des problèmes et de temps en temps de ne pas avoir de solutions immédiates.

Je dois retourner pour un moment au traitement de la minorité au Québec parce que j'ai dit que l'on doit, ici dans le grand Ouest, en Ontario et dans les autres provinces où il y a une assez grande population française, on doit avoir un traitement acceptable. Et la situation maintenant n'est pas acceptable, mais ce n'est pas la première fois que je dis ça en public. Ce n'est pas nécessairement populaire de dire ces sortes de choses ici au Manitoba, la province qui il y a exactement un siècle cette année a dit qu'il n'était pas nécessaire d'avoir des écoles françaises et que ce n'est pas un droit d'avoir un système des cours en français. Je ne suis pas fier de ça. Je me souviens quand j'ai appris l'histoire dans mes études en école secondaire de ces faits. Et c'est l'une des raisons de la diminution de la minorité française ici au Manitoba. Et vous avez malheureusement une certaine situation dans le même sens en Saskatchewan et en Alberta aussi.

Mais je dois demander au Québec de ne pas utiliser cette situation pour une excuse de diminuer les droits et les services en d'autres langues dans ta province. Parce que la situation au Québec donne un exemple que le reste du pays, le reste des provinces, doivent suivre. C'est presque un idéal. Malheureusement, pendant les vingt dernières années il y a une certaine réduction des services. Il y en a, mais on doit faire un vrai effort de recevoir des services en anglais maintenant. Et j'ai parlé des exemples de ça.

(Mr. William Chornopyski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair)

En tout cas, on doit dire que le traitement de la minorité au Québec, c'est vraiment mieux que le traitement des minorités françaises hors Québec. Et cette situation doit changer. Et je pense que ça commence à changer ici dans cette province.

Je voudrais dire aussi à mon ancienne province que le Québec doit comprendre que les autres régions ont des aspirations, des buts, des buts justes. Nous ne sommes pas un "teenager" ici dans le grand Ouest maintenant; nous sommes une population mature, une population diverse, oui. Mais une population au même point que le Québec. Nous avons plus de six millions et demie de personnes ici dans le grand Ouest. La différence et la diversité vraiment, ça. Parce qu'il y a beaucoup d'autres cultures, pas une ou deux. Nous avons une très grande population native ici et nous avons aussi un nombre de provinces au lieu d'un gouvernement. Et ça c'est un de nos problèmes dans le contexte fédéral au Canada parce que, avec un nombre de gouvernements au lieu d'un, ça ne donne pas nécessairement un pouvoir. C'est une possibilité d'avoir moins de pouvoir que la situation au Québec, une grande province avec une assez grande population, une grande majorité qui est de la même culture et une voix gouvernementale.

* (1050)

Il y a aussi d'autres groupes maintenant au Canada qui sont une partie établie de ce pays. Et je parle des immigrants plus récents. On ne peut pas ignorer le fait que nous avons plusieurs millions de personnes depuis la dernière guerre mondiale qui viennent au Canada pour l'opportunité et pour la justice. Et c'est difficile pour moi comme le représentant d'une circonscription qui a beaucoup de ces groupes-là. On doit accepter qu'ils font partie de la famille canadienne et l'on doit dire que c'est un fait de notre situation.

Il y a aussi la société distincte de nos premières personnes, les Indiens, les Inuits et aussi les Métis. Une société, M. le président, qui est distincte et qui demande finalement la reconnaissance et une participation dans le gouvernement de ce pays. Et on peut voir pendant les deux dernières semaines ici au Manitoba les manifestations de ce groupe. Et je dois dire que j'ai une vraie sympathie pour ça, pour ce groupe, et pour ses buts. Et je dois dire qu'ici en cette province nous sommes fiers de voir la réalisation dans ce groupe que ses buts sont justes aussi, qu'il peut organiser et avoir une vraie force et un vrai pouvoir dans la vie politique de cette province et, je crois aussi, dans la vie politique du Canada.

Nous sommes fiers de notre représentant indien, M. Harper. Nous avons ici dans ce caucus libéral un membre, M. Neil Gaudry de Saint-Boniface, qui représente les personnes métisses. Et par cette sorte de représentation dans l'Assemblée législative du Manitoba, une voix différente qu'avant. Et ça indique pour moi une nouvelle sorte de politique dans ce pays.

J'espère que le Québec peut écouter exactement ce qui se passe dans cette province, dans le grand Ouest,

dans les Maritimes aussi. Et qu'il ne prend pas la position que tout le monde hors du Québec rejette le fait du Québec, rejette le fait français du pays. Ce n'est pas la situation, pas la situation du tout. Nous avons vraiment des réservations que la Charte des droits, qu'il n'est pas clair qu'elle est protégée, qu'elle est paramount, alors on doit clarifier cela. Et ça reste une responsabilité de tous les premiers ministres de faire ça.

Et comme une province petite—on a seulement un peu plus d'un million de personnes ici dans cette province—et une province assez pauvre aussi. Nous ne sommes pas ici une des "have provinces", c'est une "have-not province" ici au Manitoba. Alors pour nous, la situation où il y a un gouvernement fort, un gouvernement central fort, qui protège les droits des petites provinces et qui peut offrir une certaine balance économique pour les provinces comme nous, c'est plus important pour nous d'avoir un gouvernement central assez fort qu'un gouvernement très, très décentralisé comme le fait l'Accord du lac Meech. Et c'est l'une de nos autres réservations.

En tout cas, on doit accepter, je pense, qu'il n'y a pas une solution pour le lac Meech, comme il est maintenant. Puis avec les amendements produits récemment il y a deux semaines à Ottawa, ces changements sont mieux que l'Accord du lac Meech original mais les changements ne sont pas suffisants. Et je dois dire au Québec que la situation ici pour nous dans le grand Ouest et aux Maritimes, c'est probablement comme la situation pour le Québec en 1971. En cette année, il y a une conférence constitutionnelle à Victoria où il y a une solution d'amendements qui a finalement été prise par le groupe de premiers ministres. Mais, après une review d'une semaine, je pense, M. Bourassa, à ce moment-là le nouveau premier ministre du Québec, doit dire aux dix autres premiers ministres du Canada "Malheureusement, Messieurs, ce n'est pas acceptable au Québec." Mais le pays ne quitte pas, n'est pas divisé après cela, ce n'était pas une bonne journée pour le Canada quand M. Bourassa doit dire ça. Mais ça prend un nombre d'ans après qu'on peut avoir des sessions constitutionnelles une autre fois. Ça prend un petit peu de temps. C'est probablement la situation maintenant.

Et je dois dire aussi que je ne suis pas personnellement contre M. Bourassa, parce qu'en 1970 j'ai travaillé pour le monsieur. Et je faisais partie de l'effort pour changer une circonscription dans le Sud de Montréal, la circonscription de Ste-Anne. Je travaillais pour l'équipe Bourassa pour changer la représentation de Montréal-Ste-Anne dans l'Assemblée nationale du Québec. Et finalement, après vingt-deux ans, nous avons à ce moment-là un membre libéral. Mais, M. Bourassa et son cabinet, son caucus, et je pense aussi tous les membres de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec doivent accepter qu'il y a des buts, des besoins justes en dehors du Québec. Et le problème avec l'Accord du lac Meech est que, probablement, on ne peut pas avoir assez d'attention et avoir la probabilité de succès concernant ces besoins si l'Accord du lac Meech est passé comme il est en ce moment, Et ça c'est notre problème ici dans l'Ouest.

Il y a des problèmes premièrement avec l'Accord du lac Meech et M. Mulroney fait une reconnaissance de ça.

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Il y a un problème parce qu'il n'y a pas eu un accord avec un nombre d'autres premiers ministres il y a trois ans et demie, le commencement des négociations qui résultaient dans l'Accord du lac Meech. Alors, il doit donner d'autres choses, mais il donnait d'autres choses qu'il adore vraiment, seulement pour des sessions pour le Québec. Et ça c'est le problème. L'Accord du lac Meech est plus d'une session seulement du Québec. Cela indique un changement constitutionnel assez profond pour le Canada et ça indique un problème où il n'y a pas la possibilité pour le moment d'avoir des changements acceptables dans l'avenir pour l'Ouest pour que nous puissions avoir notre but réalisé en l'avenir. Alors, avec cette sorte de situation vous avez naturellement une certaine résistance à la situation.

* (1100)

Et je pense que le Québec a la maturité maintenant pour voir en dehors de ses frontières et voir que les autres populations ont des buts justes aussi. Et je dois dire au Québec, nous vous aimons. Nous voulons que vous restiez dans la famille canadienne. Possiblement cette famille doit changer, possiblement elle doit changer dans un sens assez profond, et possiblement dans des manières différentes que les idées d'aujourd'hui. Et je dois dire que c'est une vraie possibilité que l'on peut avoir ans l'avenir des discussions pour ça. Mais, j'espère que les négociations après le lac Meech sont positives et qu'il n'y a pas de situation où il y a une négociation pour la souveraineté-association. Parce que probablement il y aurait beaucoup de résistance dans le Canada anglais concernant cette possibilité. Mais il y a beaucoup de possibilités pour des négociations sur un Canada qui est mieux que maintenant, un Canada qui accepte et reconnait les situations assez différentes dans les régions différentes. Et probablement, c'est le moment de mettre tous les points sur la table. Parce que, avec le lac Meech, je pense que, pour utiliser le terme anglais, "a lot of old business was on the table". Je pense qu'on peut passer après ça et avoir les négociations réelles et accepter les situations en dehors du Québec dans les autres régions parce que tout le monde dans ce pays doit accepter que les régions sont différentes et sont différentes pour des raisons justes. Alors, je voudrais embrasser le Québec et dire qu'une autre journée, on doit accepter cela, tout le monde. Parce que je pense que tout le monde ne voudrait pas avoir une situation où on tire dans d'autres directions différentes. Ce n'est pas bon pour les gens, ce n'est pas bon pour le pays. C'est mieux pour les autres personnes, les autres pays comme les États-Unis; ce n'est pas bon pour nous ici au Canada.

(Translation)

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give part of my speech in French today, and the reason is that I am a former citizen of the beautiful province of Quebec. And for me the process followed in the last three years has been completely incredible—to see a series of private meetings, to not have the voice of the people of each region of this country, and to see the compromises that are really unacceptable to a large part of this country. You can see the actions in this

House of my colleague immediately to the left, Mr. Harper, who has finally had to say on behalf of his people, "Enough! Stop! The process is wrong." And unfortunately I have to conclude the same thing and say that I have an affection for Mr. Harper and his people, and for the historical situation of the Native population of Canada.

I think it is very, very important for Quebec to understand that the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord does not signify that the rest of the country is pushing Quebec out of Canada. But unfortunately, with the press, radio and television in Quebec, people are constantly hearing that. That is not the truth. That is not the truth at all.

One sees almost every evening, on the televised news in Quebec, and particularly on Radio-Canada programs, the regrettable incident in Brockville eight months ago, where a Quebec flag was spread out on the ground and all the members of an extremist English group trampled on it. This is unacceptable to the great majority of the country outside of Quebec, but I need only recall the number of times that I saw the Canadian flag burned in the streets and plazas of Quebec.

There has to be a reasonable balance in the press, and I have to say that it is not responsible for the Quebec press to repeat this sort of thing, this sort of small incident and not to provide balance, the truth about the real situation in English Canada. I have good memories of Quebec; I spent nearly 22 years there. I was fairly young when my family moved there from Vancouver. We are very much an English family, my parents do not have much French, and my sister and I were not in the school system at that time. But my family found that the province was certainly interesting, historical, and that there were many things to do there, and real warmth. The hospitality of French-Canadians is truly amazing and we have very positive memories of that.

I decided after taking my primary, secondary and university education in Montreal, to work for the federal Government and, unfortunately, it became necessary for me to move around the country. My parents decided not to leave Quebec and not to move out West. They decided to maintain their friendships in British Columbia, and maintain their home in Quebec and retire there. I am intending to return to La Belle Province but unfortunately I have had a small personal delay. I intended to be there for the national celebrations this Sunday but because of the debate here in the Legislative Chamber of Manitoba, I have had to put off my departure a bit.

I also have memories of the treatment of the English-speaking minority in Quebec, and I have to say that the treatment of this minority is very, very good. As far as I, and I believe most of this minority are concerned, the treatment for many years was entirely acceptable, and this is a goal for Francophone minorities outside Quebec. I could say that the Government here in Manitoba must have the courage to offer services and programs as a right in this province, exactly as is done in Quebec. But I must also express certain reservations because, since 1966, there have been certain attitude changes in the Province of Quebec in

regard to its minority. For me, the change began with an amendment to the Act respecting bilingual road signs in Quebec.

Immediately before Expo '67, there began a change regarding bilingual road signs in all of Quebec. This was not a positive move, and in fact it raised certain concerns over the safety of drivers and their passengers.

Interestingly enough, a week ago I read an article in a paper indicating that there was a study in Quebec precisely to check whether there are problems with the safety of drivers and passengers on the roads of Quebec, and the conclusions are not definite: certain members of the community agree and others disagree. It is interesting that after 24 years they are still debating this sort of thing and there is still no real answer to it. That is somewhat like Canada. It is not a big issue, but it is a small symbol of the same sort of problem which you have between Quebec and the other parts of Canada.

We are still debating, and I think it has been the same thing for the last century. There are problems between Canada's regions, between the two official language groups, and this was the case before the creation of Canada. One need only recall the insurrections in Ontario as well as Quebec in 1837-38. The same sort of problem probably occurs in a country such as Canada, which has two official languages and now a number of other cultures. It is probably in our future to have disputes and problems, and at times not to have immediate solutions for them.

I want to return for a moment to the treatment of the minority in Quebec because I have said that we must, here in the West, in Ontario and in the other provinces where there is a fairly large Francophone population, we must have acceptable treatment. And the situation now is not acceptable. This is not the first time I have said this in public. It is not necessarily popular to say this sort of thing in Manitoba, the province which exactly one century ago this year declared that it was unnecessary to have French schools and that a court system in French was not a right. I am not proud of that. I remember when I learned these facts in history class at secondary school. And this is one of the reasons for the decrease of the Francophone minority here in Manitoba, and you have unfortunately somewhat similar situations in Saskatchewan and Alberta also.

But I have to ask Quebec not to use this situation as an excuse to reduce rights and services in other languages in that province, because the situation in Quebec provides an example that the rest of the country, the rest of the provinces, ought to follow. It is almost an ideal. Unfortunately, over the last 20 years there has been a certain reduction of services. They are still there but you have to make a real effort to receive services in English now, and I have talked about examples of that.

In any case, we have to say of the treatment of the minority in Quebec that it is certainly better than the treatment of Francophone minorities outside of Quebec. And this situation must change, and I think that it is beginning to change here in this province.

I would also like to say to my former province that Quebec must understand that the other regions have reasonable aspirations and goals. We in the West are not a teenager. We are a mature population, a diverse population, yes, but a population on the same footing as Quebec's. We have more than six-and-a-half-million people here in the West, and there are great differences and diversities because there are many other cultures, not just one or two. We have a very large Native population here.

We also have a number of provinces, rather than one Government, and this is one of our problems in the federal context of Canada, because several Governments rather than one do not necessarily mean more power. It is possible to have less power than in Quebec, a big province with a fairly large population, a great majority of which shares the same culture under a single Government.

There are also other groups in Canada which are now an established part of this country, and I am referring to more recent immigrants. We cannot ignore the fact that several million people have come to Canada since the last World War for the opportunities and justice our country affords them. And it is difficult for me, as the representative of a constituency where many of these groups are found. It has to be acknowledged that they are part of the Canadian family, and that this is a reality of our situation.

There is also the distinct society of our first peoples, the Indians, Inuit, and Metis, a society, Mr. Speaker, which is distinct and which is finally demanding recognition and participation in governing this country. And we have seen, over the last two weeks in Manitoba, the demonstrations by this group. I have to say that I have real sympathy for that, for this group and its objectives. And I must say that we in this province are proud to see the realization within this group that its goals are likewise just and that it can organize and have real strength and real power in the political life of this province, and I believe, in the political life of Canada as well.

We are proud of our Indian representative, Mr. Harper. Here in the Liberal Caucus, we have a Member, Mr. Neil Gaudry (St. Boniface), who represents the Metis people, and through this sort of representation in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba we have different voices than in the past. And this indicates for me that there is a new type of politics in this country.

I hope that Quebec can hear exactly what is occurring in this province, in the West, and also in the Maritimes, and not take the position that everyone outside of Quebec is rejecting the Quebec fact, and is rejecting the French fact in this country. This is not the situation at all. We really do have reservations regarding the Charter of Rights, that it is unclear whether it is protected, and that it is paramount, so we have to clarify that and it remains the responsibility of all the First Ministers to do so.

And we are a small province—we have only a little over a million people—and are a fairly poor one also. We are not one of the "have" provinces; Manitoba is a "have-not" province, so, for us, a situation where

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you have a strong central Government that protects the rights of the small provinces like ours, and can offer a certain economic equilibrium, is more important than a very highly decentralized Government as would happen under the Meech Lake Accord. This is one of our other reservations.

In any event, I think we must accept that there is no solution for Meech Lake as it now stands. And as for the amendments produced two weeks ago in Ottawa, these changes are better than the original Meech Lake Accord but they are still inadequate, and I will say to Quebec that the situation here for us in the West and in the Maritimes is probably like Quebec's situation in 1971. In that year there was a Constitutional Conference at Victoria where a solution regarding amendments was finally arrived at by the First Ministers, but after a one-week review, I think, Mr. Bourassa, at that time the newly elected Premier of Quebec, said to the other 10 First Ministers of Canada, "Unfortunately, gentlemen, this is not acceptable to Quebec." But the country did not quit, was not divided after that. It was not a good day for Canada when Mr. Bourassa had to say what he did. It then took a number of years before it was again possible to hold further constitutional sessions. It takes a bit of time and this is probably the situation now.

I also have to say that I am not personally against Mr. Bourassa for, in 1970, I worked for the gentleman and participated in the effort to change a constituency in south Montreal. I worked for the Bourassa team to change Montreal-Ste-Anne's representation in the Quebec National Assembly. And finally, after 22 years we now have a Liberal Member. But Mr. Bourassa and his Cabinet, his caucus, and I think all the Members of the Quebec National Assembly must accept the fact that there are reasonable objectives and needs outside of Quebec. And the problem with the Meech Lake Accord is that these matters will not be given enough attention and will not have a probability of success if the Meech Lake Accord is passed in its present form. And this is our problem here in the West.

There were problems from the beginning with the Meech Lake Accord, and Mr. Mulroney has recognized that fact. There was a problem because there was no agreement with a number of other Premiers three and a half years ago at the beginning of the negotiations which resulted in the Meech Lake Accord. So he had to give away other things, but he gave away things that he cherished just for the sake of a Quebec round. And therein lies the problem.

The Meech Lake Accord is more than simply a Quebec round. It signals quite a profound constitutional change for Canada and that entails a problem in that there is no possibility for the time being of achieving acceptable changes for the West that would permit our objectives to be realized in the future. So with this sort of situation you naturally get a certain amount of resistance. I think that Quebec now has the maturity to look beyond its own borders and see that other populations also have reasonable objectives. I have to say to Quebec that we do love you and want you to stay within the Canadian family. Perhaps this family needs to change, possibly change in quite a profound

way, and possibly in ways different from today's ideas. And I have to say it is a real possibility that we could have discussions in the future about that.

But I hope that the post-Meech Lake negotiations are positive, and that there will not be negotiations on sovereignty association, because likely there would be a lot of resistance to that in English Canada. But there are many possibilities for negotiations about a Canada that is better than it is now. A Canada that accepts and recognizes the range of situations that exist in different regions, and probably that would be the time to put all the items on the table because with Meech Lake, I think—to use the English term—a lot of old business was on the table. And I think we can go beyond that, and have real negotiations, and accept the situations outside Quebec in the other regions, because everyone in this country must acknowledge that the regions are all different and are different for good reasons.

So, I would like to embrace Quebec, and say that another day will dawn, and we all must accept that, because I think that no one would want a situation where we are pulling in different directions. That is not good for the people, nor the country. It may be all right for other people, other countries, like the United States, but it is not good for us here in Canada.

(English)

I would like to say a few words in English now because the response that I have had out of my constituency on this matter has been absolutely overwhelming. I have had calls, I have been buttonholed on the streets, I have had to address public meetings. I do not know of another single issue that has caused more interest but also more consternation than that of this constitutional amendment in the way that it was so very, very poorly handled. The spectacle of a member of the federal administration, who had not even been elected dogcatcher, coming to this province and telling us how we should do things is totally unacceptable. It is reprehensible and I think it indicates a complete lack of ethics in that federal administration, and I refer to the efforts of Senator Lowell Murray.

Then we, of course, have the wonderful juxtaposition of having my leader, Mrs. Carstairs, read from Mr. Mulroney's book of 1983 all the wonderful things that he would do on constitutional amendments and how the people would be involved to the hilt. Well, the people were not involved at all because that man conducted himself in the same way that he acted as a hatchet man for an iron ore company of Canada when he shut down the mine in the town of Schefferville, Quebec. That is what he was trained for, that is what he was paid for, and that is how he is operating as our Prime Minister. I can tell you that the people of Canada are going to tell Mr. Mulroney in the next election to get lost, because they are not going to have their First Minister conducting the serious affairs of their country in that fashion.

The whole process has been nothing short of an abomination. We here have a tradition of public involvement, and we are very proud of it. I would hope

other provinces such as Quebec, such as Ontario, such as Nova Scotia, would perhaps emulate us, because I think it is an ideal that should be emulated.

(Mr. Speaker in the Chair)

Every single piece of legislation that goes before this House is put to public hearing, and I can say, having been a participant through those hearings, they are not always exciting and they are not always stimulating. There are a lot of long, late hours put in, but we put them in willingly because we are hearing from the people. That is the difference on this process; it was, shut the people out. The only public participation you saw whatsoever—and the suspicion is that half of those crowds outside the national conference centre on confusion square were paid people—that was the only public participation we saw.

Now we went so far as to have unofficial public meetings here through the efforts of the Meech Lake Task Force a year back, and that gave us somewhat of a feeling that it was not a full public hearing process. That was what was proposed to be done. Unfortunately, because of the time bind created by Mr. Mulroney's throw of the dice, we are not getting to it. We have 3,000 and some citizens of this province that would like to have a say-so and an input in the changing of the most important law that governs any country—the Constitution of Canada.

I will have to say I have had some concerns about sentiments displayed by the national press and by certain leaders across this country of the fact that it is just those anti-French, anti-Quebec bigots at it again. I will have to say back on that one word, hogwash. If people are listened to a little more often and talked to each other a little more often, we would have a hell of a lot less problems in this country. I have to say, I represent a riding—and it was a riding I represented as a city councillor, a ward, for some years before that—that very ward voted the second highest in a city referendum on French rights at City Hall. I am very proud of that, and I espoused that in the '83 campaign. I have no fear of saying where I stand on things.

I think the time has passed in Manitoba where we will see reprehensible legislation like that of 1890, as I said in the French part of my dialogue, and I would like to say that times have changed in Manitoba. We even have a Conservative Government now saying they will offer more French services, and I hail them for that. That was not easy to do. Keep up the good work, but that is the sort of change that has come. It is too bad we have a Prime Minister, though, that goes along with Saskatchewan putting the thumbs down on extension of French rights in that province and ditto for Alberta. Of course, we know what the heck he did about minority rights in Quebec. He washed his hands of it. I think we all remember a certain senior Government official in the Middle East doing that some 2,000 years ago. A price was paid there, too.

I would have to say, as I draw to a close on my address on this very important matter, that I, the Members of this Legislature, and I think most of the population of this province, quite frankly embrace Quebec. We do not want to see it leave. We do not

think it is necessary. I have to take issue with the statements coming out of what I call my home province saying: we will only enter Confederation with dignity and not on our knees. Well, I do not know what the heck they were doing on their knees. We sure did not think they were.

* (1110)

The fact of the matter is in the early '80s, when very serious debate was going on on how to bring the Constitution home from Westminster—where it did not belong, it should never have been left in London in 1867, but that is how we have evolved from a colony, is very, very slowly—we had a separatist Government in Quebec, and there was no way that Government was going to be a party to a repatriation of the Canadian Constitution and an establishment or an entrenchment in any way of a status quo.

I say that to the people of Quebec, and I say that to the Quebec press corps who are around Winnipeg at this moment, let us not have a lot of nonsense. There was no way that Quebec was going to participate as long as you had a separatist Government in power whose avowed intentions were to pull Quebec out of the Canadian Confederation.

That having been said, however, the situation did change and the province did say no to that same separatist Government in a referendum, a very emotional referendum, and they said it quite clearly. That is the unfortunate part about how the Meech Lake Accord has fallen apart, because this should be Quebec fully embracing Canada, making that next step.

Because of that, I find myself very much pulled, having lived a very large part of my life and all of my formative years in that province, to see that it has not been possible to have that thing happen, and I think it is necessary to have Quebec as a signatory to the Canadian Constitution, but not at any price, not at any price.

That means if the other regions are going to be precluded from having the possibility of change, which would answer their aspirations and goals, that is not good enough, nor are the exclusion of the other Territories becoming provinces, nor the exclusion of aboriginal rights, it is just not acceptable, but we have to find a way to work this out.

I am convinced that there is now enough on the table of people knowing what the regions think. Maybe there is a possibility that a new process could follow, and that new process may not follow overnight. It very well may have to take a number of years, and we may end up with a Canada quite different from a Canada we conceived of or expect to have come out of this, but something has to be done. I would like to see Quebec try and remain positive with its doors open for communication, because I think it will find willing partners to sit down at that table. We will not deal with it in the fashion that we have as a sort of labour negotiation.

I will carry that message as well to Quebec personally. I will be going down there as soon as I can get away.

I will be talking to people down there and listening particularly to the sentiments that are out there, but Quebec is not entering, or trying to enter back, Confederation on its knees. We have never thought of it as such, and I hope the heck they do not. I ask people to carry that message, because there is a lot of warmth in English Canada toward Quebec, and we want to see them fully embraced in the Canadian Confederation, and we will do it another day in another way with a better Prime Minister. Thank you.

Mr. Paul Edwards (St. James): Mr. Speaker, it is with no small amount of humility that I rise today to participate in this debate in this House. I have some notes in front of me, but believe me, I am searching for words, as I think all of us are, to express some of our feelings which have been born of this process which has wrought frustration, anger, disappointment and indeed the bonds of friendship in the course of these three years, based on the trauma which many of us have been put through, no moreso than the three Leaders in this House.

Mr. Speaker, it is a solemn day for this province and indeed for this country. I want to also say in the brief time that I have that I believe it is also a day of new hope for us all. I do not underestimate the seriousness of the predicted consequences for our country if and when the Meech Lake Accord fails, as it appears it most surely will.

I relish quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, in the rekindled pride of our Native people in this province and in this country. Their strength, as shown to us in these recent days, and as embodied in our colleague, Mr. Harper, the MLA for Rupertsland, I think is a symbol to us all of the continuing strength and fortitude of our original people.

His words yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I must say, spoke to me like no one else's have in this debate. Truly our original people have shown patience to us. Truly they have waited and waited and given and given. They have now taken the actions they have in this last week and used our laws, our processes to bring their grievances, their aspirations home to us.

Mr. Speaker, the symbolism, in my view, is indeed something that we will all remember as a moving and a beautiful one because I think that the aboriginal people said to us this last week, despite the threats that we face, that now you will not negotiate with us in good faith because we will not give you Meech Lake, despite that, despite the harassment and the pressures which they have faced in this week, they have said "enough." They have said you as a nation cannot and should not go forward without us.

Mr. Speaker, I think we underestimate vastly the gift that is to us. The pride and the strength of our native people is a strength which we desperately need in this nation, and I thank them for showing that strength in this last week. I do look to them for the future of our country.

Mr. Speaker, we must all, as I have said, be cognizant, regardless of political stripe or the way we feel even about this issue, of the consequences that many predict

for our country regardless of the fate of the Meech Lake Accord.

I do not like the Meech Lake Accord, Mr. Speaker, as a document, as a statement of vision for our present citizens, or as a blueprint for the future for our generations of Canadians to come. I have felt that way, and I have expressed those sentiments as has my Leader for almost three years now.

There are many aspects of the accord that can be criticized and it is not my intention today to review those arguments. They are many, and they are well known. I am sorely tempted, Mr. Speaker, because as someone who has studied the Constitution of our country both in law school and practised a profession in which its wording was involved, I have been dismayed that the Meech Lake Accord may in fact become the law of the land, but today I fear that it is not the time to rehash those arguments, partly because the detailed arguments on the actual wording of the Meech Lake Accord have lost relevance in the raging public debate.

I regret that fact, but I concede reluctantly that because of the crapshoot gauntlet that the present Prime Minister has constructed for us we must now deal only in the emotional arena that is left simply because nothing else was listened to prior to today with any seriousness or with any openness and also partly because I am cognizant of my colleagues' desire to also speak today, and I want to be brief. I am going to concentrate on the emotion which I think Canadians feel today, the emotion which I feel today, and the things we want to express about the future of our country.

Perhaps it is appropriately ironic that all we are left with today is emotion and passion in this debate because in many respects, as my Leader said in her speech, this country is based more than anything else on an ethos. We have been born as a nation not of anything we can empirically isolate as a reason for existence or unity. Rather we have been born and grown as a nation out of a sense that we must stay together and build a nation that is different from our neighbours, that is strong yet understanding, that is compassionate yet decisive.

The feeling that I have for this country and the ethos that I think I share with my fellow Canadians I hope will lead me and they to find a better way to build a Constitution in this country and a better way to build a country than blackmail brought upon us by the Prime Minister of this country in the last years and in particular in the last months. My feelings stem from being born in Ontario, raised in four western provinces, spending a year in high school out of the country in Scotland, going to university both in Saskatchewan and Ontario, learning French in Quebec over the course of a summer, travelling again for seven months to Asia and seeing this country from the outside, and also from being raised in a family which had a great pride in this country and was deeply committed to it and to its future and as well to its political system.

* (1120)

This country has been very, very good to me, Mr. Speaker. In my short life this country has been very

good to me. It has offered to me the benefits of I think a very fine education. It has offered me a good standard of living. It has offered me safety and security in the cities and towns in which I have lived. It has offered me the opportunity to visit other nations. When I went to Asia it was all paid for by the federal Government. It has offered me the opportunity to learn French in Quebec at the expense of the Canadian taxpayer. It is a country which I deeply want to see go forward together, and so I am cognizant today most seriously of my feeling that I want to do the right thing for my country. I think we all do.

In that vein I want to speak very briefly about the Province of Quebec. If only the Meech Lake Accord was only about Quebec, Mr. Speaker—the debate may have degenerated to that, to be only as to whether or not you are pro- or anti-Quebec, but the Meech Lake Accord is far from only about Quebec. It has ramifications from coast to coast to coast in this nation.

To my fellow Canadians in Quebec, I want to say today that I think we have a future together and I want to go forward in developing that future. We cannot do it in the process that we have been through. It will not work with blackmail, with manufactured crisis and with glib rhetoric which has proven again and again hollow. To the people of Quebec, I think we all want to say in this House, we want to move forward and we want you with us and we want to meet again and we want to share the things that we know we have in common and build upon them.

Mr. Speaker, the theme that I think is in my mind today, and I suggest for others, is one put forward by Robert Frost. That is the line, "And I, I took the road less travelled by and that has made all the difference." This country has taken the road less travelled by. Elijah Harper took the road less travelled by. Manitoba's Leaders took the road less travelled by. Mulroney, on the other hand, took any road he could find and in his desperation he took us down that road that was easiest at the time and that leads us to the point today at which we face threats of the break-up of our country.

I think the road ahead is a road with hills, valleys and turns and one that will not be easily negotiated, but I think that we can achieve it. I think we can manoeuvre it. I think we can do it if we have the aboriginal people with us, by our side. I think we can do it if we have the people from Quebec with us. I think we can do it if we have the women of this country with us, the disadvantaged of this country with us, and are Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

We must deal with each other honestly and that is something I believe has not been possible in the process that we have been through. It is a process which took us right from the closed-door sessions in which the participants were intentionally isolated and exhausted, to a hearing process in Ottawa in which the chairperson of the committee said to the majority of the Members before the hearing started, we will listen to the people, we will be polite, but by the way we are not changing a word, we are not changing a letter, we are not changing a comma.

Mr. Speaker, that process will not do and it must be changed. Those are not new words. Everyone else has

said them too, but I call upon the leaders of this country to put their words into action. I sensed with some dismay a week ago Saturday that they were all talking about the process being bankrupt of any merit, but at the same time they relished in it. I say as one Canadian, that will not do. We cannot ignore the people of this country and their legitimate feelings about the Constitution. This is not The Highway Traffic Act. This is not something that we can change. It is not a labour contract that is going to come up in 10 or two years or one year, it is the Constitution.

If it cannot articulate a vision that speaks to us all then, Mr. Speaker, it is not going to do the job for the future. It may serve us for the present, it may deal with the crisis today. It may take us a year, two years, 10 years down the road but it will not serve us for the future. It has to grow like a living tree and if it cannot do that then it will have failed and we will have failed as the people responsible for drafting it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close by acknowledging the role that my constituents have played for me in this debate. I thank them for their many comments on this issue. I applaud the role that non-elected Canadians have played in this debate, both at the task force and in recent weeks, as we as Manitoba MLAs with the special responsibility and duty we have, have looked for guidance. Manitobans have spoken out and for that I am truly grateful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Mr. Speaker, when I was first elected as a Member of this Legislature nine years ago I felt somewhat odd. I remember saying at the time it was like a dream come true and I guess I had some sense at the time of the kind of responsibilities that I was assuming as a Member of the Legislature, newly elected by the people of Thompson by the margin of 72 votes that I am often reminded of. I knew at the time that I would be involved in some fairly significant debates, but I do not think I had any idea at the time that I would be witnessing history as indeed I feel that I have as a Member of this Legislature certainly in the last number of years but especially the last several weeks.

As I watched what has happened the last period of time, I have been struck by some of the thoughts I had when I was studying history, reading about this country's great history as a child. I am seeing that, just as has happened in the past in terms of history, we are seeing many of the same sorts of characteristics in this debate on this significant issue. We are seeing some of the best in people, communities, provinces in this country and we are seeing, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately some of the worst as well.

* (1130)

On the positive side, I think we have seen a real effort to deal with what Canada is really all about, our identity as a country and, while it may not have been apparent, I really believe that was the guiding principle of the 11 First Ministers who signed the original Meech Lake Accord. I believe it was the guiding principle of the

many Manitobans who participated in the task force, the discussions that led to the all-Party report and recommendations. I believe that was the guiding principle that the three Party Leaders took to Ottawa, part of the seven days of discussions. I do believe that was the guiding principle that led the three Party Leaders to ask their caucuses to recommend the accord that was originally signed plus the additional amendments to the Constitution and the process as set out to be accepted by this country and accepted here in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I must confess that I have been disturbed at times as well. I have been disturbed by the difficulty we have had in understanding each other, disturbed by events such as the people—it does not matter which community as much—the people who decided that they had to make a protest by treading on the Quebec flag, something I found reprehensible. I watched with disbelief as I saw a then federal Cabinet Minister say that Canada might have to make the choice between Quebec and Newfoundland.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe that this country must stand united, that the 25 million people of this country must stand united if we are to maintain our unique identity and build on that identity in a continent of over 300 million people. I believe fundamentally that we cannot divide this country. It is not a question if we want Newfoundland or Manitoba or Quebec. We need all ten provinces; we need the aboriginal people; we need the founding people; we need the many people who have come to this country from all across the world. That is why I supported the position of the three Party Leaders. That is why I believe they made a very courageous decision, accepted five conditions of Quebec, which I believe are reasonable conditions.

I will say that I believe Quebec is a distinct society. Its history is distinct; it has a unique system of laws. It is the only province, the only jurisdiction in North America where French is the majority language. I believe Quebec is a distinct society and I believe the Canadian Constitution must reflect not only that Quebec is part of the Constitution, but that it is a distinct society. I believe that what the Leaders did two weeks ago, and I know it was difficult, when they were standing on the precipice, they said yes, not just to a single province but they said yes to Canada.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I share the strong feelings that they expressed about the process. This is no way to make a Constitution, locking people up in rooms, not having public debate, limiting public participation.

Even in the last few days the federal Government has been suggesting that we not have public hearings, or that we cut short our process in terms of listening to the people of this province. That is not the way to make a Constitution. That is not the way to build a country.

I recognize that they were standing with the choice. The only choice they had at that time was very clear, yes or no, because everyone said the June 23 deadline is the only deadline. This is the only agreement that can be considered. It is yes or no.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that they said yes in their heart for Canada. I must say that even as events unfold I

continue to have my strong feelings about the process, because there are now reports coming out of Ottawa that the House of Commons is being called into Session. There is talk that there may be some attempt to unbungle the Meech Lake Accord, because as we are aware there are certain provisions of the Meech Lake Accord that do not require unanimous approval, that require the support of seven provinces with 50 percent of the population. I only just a few minutes ago received a report that seems to be what is happening.

I want to say that if the federal Government feels, at this late point, that it has to make such a desperate move, and if it is even still considering them, I will say that in this province—and I am speaking in terms of those who supported the decision that was made in Ottawa to come back and recommend the Meech Lake Accord—that will be a denial of the trust, the commitment they made two weeks ago, because if it was all or nothing, if it was June 23 with no possibility of extension that is why they made that commitment.

If that is not the case, if the federal Government believes that it can now go past June 23, I want to say to them, Mr. Speaker, that I believe they cannot leave out some of the fundamental flaws in that accord. They must deal with those flaws. In particular they must deal with the needs of aboriginal people, the needs that have been expressed so passionately, so eloquently these last number of weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about that for a moment, what has happened the last number of weeks. It was interesting, I talked to a number of people yesterday, aboriginal people. I talked to one person I know who is the chief of his reserve. I do not want to mention names or a particular reserve, but he said, you know I have just been very outspoken these last couple of weeks, much more outspoken. I am talking about the Member for Rupertsland, Elijah Harper.

Mr. Speaker, I said to that, you know I have sat in this House as long as the Member for Rupertsland has. I remember his first speech. He talked about the Constitution in his first speech and how it was unacceptable that aboriginal people had not been included in the Constitutional Accord of 1981-82.

My point to him, my point to this Legislature, my point to the country is that people such as Elijah Harper, the aboriginal people of this country have been consistently saying the same thing, not just in the last two weeks, but throughout our history. They have been saying, we are a founding people. They have been saying they want recognition. They want action on the many severe problems they face socially and economically.

So I say, Mr. Speaker, their message has been the same. The problem has been this country has not been listening. I believe in these last few weeks this country has learned many lessons about aboriginal people. I believe in this Legislature, we have all learned a lot of lessons from our aboriginal people.

As a northern Member of this House with many Native people in my constituency, I can say that one thing I have consistently found as a Member of the Legislature—I am continually learning—I have found

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these last two weeks to be a learning experience that I will never forget in terms of our aboriginal people and I expect to learn a lot more.

You know, I talked about history before, Mr. Speaker. We have heard many analogies in terms of what history is all about. I believe to a certain extent that history is like a series of rivers and streams that flow. I had the feeling last week, and there are many people here I have talked to about it, that as of last week even though in this building we thought we had some control over what was happening, it really was history. Those rivers were flowing.

I believe there is an analogy, Mr. Speaker, using that in terms of what is history that the aboriginal people have been saying to us. The problem with the constitutional process in Canada has been that we have been saying that there is one river, reinstating Quebec into the Constitution, and I agree with that. No Constitution can be legitimate if Quebec is not part of that process.

The problem was that river, that one flow, but aboriginal people were told that they were a stream, that once we had gone down the river, we might get off into the stream of dealing with aboriginal concerns.

What we have seen in these last couple of weeks is that aboriginal people, speaking through Elijah Harper, the Member for Rupertsland in this Legislature, said that aboriginal people are not a stream, they are part of that river. That as you travel down that river to bringing about a whole Canada, a whole Constitution, you cannot put aboriginal people to the side. They have to be part of the main process.

* (1140)

What I found amazing about what has happened in the last few weeks is that I think we have all in this Chamber come to understand that, but there still appears to be a problem, particularly in Ottawa, in terms of comprehending what has happened and there is an irony, Mr. Speaker, on what has happened in this province.

One Member, the only Native Member of this Legislature, has not stalled the debate through obstruction. He has used the rules of the Chamber. He said no, probably one of the most historic single words that has been uttered in Canadian history. It has been no to diverging from the rules.

If anybody knows about the parliamentary system and if anybody has read our rules, and I know many people the last few weeks have, for the first time perhaps, started to read our rules to try to understand our parliamentary system, they will know that is the very basis of parliamentary democracy. It is based, not on a party system, but it was originally based on a system that evolved out of the concept of representation, parliamentary democracy based on the individual Member of the Legislature. That is what the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper) has done. It is ironic; he has used the parliamentary system to defend aboriginal rights.

I would just refer people to Beauchesne's, and I quoted from this last Thursday. I just want to refer

people to what our parliamentary system is based on, the principles of parliamentary law. This is from Beauchesne's, which is the representation of the parliamentary system in Canada. I just want to quote two sections. The principles of the parliamentary law are "to protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority; to give abundant opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken upon sudden impulse."

Mr. Speaker, I believe that is what the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper) has done. That is what he has done; he has lived up to the most basic principles of parliamentary democracy. That is not to say that others in this Chamber, the other 56 Members did not also in their own way and for their participation in the many debates on this very important historical matter also respect the parliamentary duties, but I think we have to acknowledge that the Member for Rupertsland not only had the ability to do this, not only had the right to do this, but had the moral authority. The Member for Churchill (Mr. Cowan) talked about this. I remember even in private discussions the term moral authority coming up.

As I stand here on this date discussing this important historical matter, I really believe that we in Manitoba would not necessarily have had the moral authority. We might have had the right to say no. For whatever reasons, legitimate criticisms of the Meech Lake Accord, I really believe, Mr. Speaker, that perhaps no single province or number of people would have that right, but I in no way question the moral authority of the Native people, especially in this province. We have the highest percentage of Native people of any province in Canada. This province was founded by Native people—the Metis, Louis Riel, Mr. Speaker.

Who can forget in terms of history, and who can forget how this province was formed and why it was formed? It was formed because the Metis said that their rights had to be respected. It was a rebellion, Mr. Speaker, a provisional Government. Some have even said, they held the gun to the head of Canada and negotiated with a gun at Canada's head. There has been no rebellion in the Province of Manitoba. What has happened is aboriginal people have used the rules as is historical tradition to take a stand on their rights.

It is ironic, because if anyone is holding a gun at anyone's head, it is the Prime Minister. He said to the First Ministers two weeks ago and to the Party Leaders of Manitoba, take it or leave it. Mr. Speaker, he said there will be dire consequences if Meech Lake is not passed. What I think bothers me fundamentally as someone who accepts the five basic principles outlined in terms of constitutional reform by Quebec and accepts the need to bring Quebec into Confederation is the fact that I believe the Prime Minister runs the risk of setting in place a self-fulfilling prophecy. I believe there may be dire consequences if what has happened is misunderstood, and I want to say, as clearly as I can, particularly to the people of Quebec, understanding the fact that they are the only province that is not a signature to the Constitution of Canada, I am saying yes to Quebec.

I believe Canadians are saying yes to Quebec. The problem we are in, Mr. Speaker, is because the Prime Minister of this country just does not understand. He just does not understand that you cannot have a Constitution that is the very basis of legitimacy of our laws, our political system. You cannot have an illegitimate process to do that. The Prime Minister does not understand that you cannot build tolerance and greater understanding through threats and intimidation and, as I said, if there is any intention on the part of the federal Government to now, when we have come this far, try some procedural or tactical move to separate the Meech Lake Accord and pass some sections, I believe that will be the most fundamental betrayal that I have ever seen of process in Canadian history. It will be a betrayal for the leaders of the Parties, the caucuses in this province. It will be a betrayal of the aboriginal people who have stood up these last several weeks, and Canadians across this country. It will be a betrayal fundamentally to those who have said yes to Quebec and yes to the Meech Lake Accord, and I urge the Prime Minister, if there was any consideration of that, please do not do that to us.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned about rivers. It is funny, I felt that this week I have perhaps come into a river, the main stream, and I do want to talk for a moment from a personal basis. I am an adopted Canadian, if you like; I came to this country with my parents in 1967.

An Honourable Member: A log cabin.

Mr. Ashton: Well, we did not move to a log cabin in Thompson, but my parents were like many other immigrants before them, they came with very little except hope, hope for a better life. You know, I can truthfully say, Mr. Speaker, that what they hoped for has happened. I look at my own situation, I mentioned before when I was elected as the Member of the Legislature for Thompson, it was a dream come true, representing my home town of Thompson, and I look at what has happened since, the pride. I remember my wife, an immigrant from Greece, she became a Canadian citizen, the birth of our two children in Thompson. I remember the spirit of 1967, I still remember arriving in Winnipeg, the excitement, the open spaces. I also remember the 700-mile drive to Thompson, the adjustment to northern weather. We arrived in April, and I was surprised to see snow on the ground. You can imagine how surprised I was when there was snow on the ground, once again, in June.

* (1150)

I still remember that and I sometimes ask myself what happened to that spirit. What happened to the spirit, Mr. Speaker, of 1967, a hundred years old, a young country? When I look around this room, when I watched the spectacle of our Constitution being made, a new country still, we are not an old country, 123 years, but there is the sense of premature aging. I am sure anyone who went through Ottawa must have felt that. Certainly I feel that in this Chamber we prematurely aged the last couple of weeks, but this is a young country, it has so much potential.

If we, as Canadians, have any doubt, just talk to anyone from overseas. I am always struck, Mr. Speaker,

by how, when you travel anywhere, people in other countries envy us, our standard of living, our social and economic justice in this country, our welcoming of people throughout the world.

What has gone wrong? Why do we sometimes seem to be united only by our opposition? I must admit sometimes I too fall into that. Certainly if the Prime Minister's name is mentioned I must admit that my instinctive reaction is to join the many other people, but it is not a political thing. We tend to do it regionally. There is always the us and there is always the them. I look at it a different way. When it comes to the regions of this country, people of this country, the languages, I think it is about time we recognized we are all "us." We are not the "thems." We are all "us," we are all in this together, 25 million people out of 300 million people in North America.

You know, I mention on a personal note, and there are really two things I think put this all into perspective for me today as I was looking at what I was going to say in this Chamber. It was the perspective, Mr. Speaker, of first of all my children. My daughter is seven years old, my son is five. We have become sort of the quintessential Canadian family now, both of us immigrants, my children born here, their language at home is Greek, the language at school is French. My daughter asked the other day if we could put her in Spanish or Ukrainian lessons. We attend church at the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church in Thompson.

She has been watching the Meech Lake debate and she is beginning to understand, my daughter, who is seven years old. The first question she asked me the other day was, is Quebec going to separate. Is Quebec going to separate, seven years old. I asked her what she thought and she did not see any reason why Quebec should separate. She felt Canadians—she does not even understand the difference between languages, it has become so easy for her to switch back and forth. The same with my son, English, French, Greek. I started thinking in terms of that, perhaps there is hope in the next generation.

The other thing that brought it together for me was the aboriginal people. The Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper), I remember talking to him the day after the Meech Lake Accord was signed. There was some talk at the time that perhaps aboriginal concerns would be dealt best under the Meech Lake agreement that was signed, the constitutional process that was there. Elijah Harper, the Member for Rupertsland said what is in it is so little for us that even if it is a generation, even if it is 50 years before we get our complete recognition in Canadian society, when you have been here for so many years, when you have watched other people come to this land for 400 years, time has different sense. You know, Mr. Speaker, perhaps he is right.

As I stand here, as I said, out of the sense of having watched history, I do not believe, if indeed this is history, that this is the final chapter. I believe it is just one chapter. If anybody looks back, anyone who studies history, we have been through many crises in this country. Whether you go back to 1776 when the original Canadians said no to joining the United States of America, or the War of 1812, or 1867, as the aboriginal

people, the French, the English, and since 1867 many new Canadians from all across the world.

I believe with every crisis people have said yes to this country. That is my hope for the future, Mr. Speaker. It is a hope for my children. It is a hope for this province and for everyone in this province. I just hope that perhaps when we write the next chapter we will do it right this time, that it will not be take it or leave it, that it will not be sign or dire consequences will take place, that it will not be 11 men in a room. I quite frankly do not think it matters if it is 11 men or women, 11 people in a room. I believe we have to do it right.

We have to say yes to Quebec, yes to our aboriginal people. We have to involve the women of this country fully in the process. We have to recognize multiculturalism. Above all else, Mr. Speaker, what we have to do is say we will never, ever again allow the making of Constitutions to be done by anyone else other than the people of this country. A Constitution has to be a document developed by the people of a country for the people. I believe that despite its merits with the Meech Lake that is the most fundamental flaw. Yet, as I said, I know why the decision was made to sign it.

Mr. Speaker, my final words are this. Let us do it better next time. Let us not out of the ashes of this process proceed to try some procedural trick and some constitutional trickery. Let us think about it for a while and let us start that new process, a more democratic process that involves everyone in this country. I believe that maybe we can, just maybe we can recreate some of the optimism that built this country, the optimism that I saw in this country in 1967. As I said, we are a young country. We have much more history yet to be written. Let us make sure that when we write the next few chapters we have a happy ending, a happy ending for all of us, the aboriginal people, for Quebec, for all Canadians. Thank you.

Mr. James Carr (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in this historic debate without joy and without enthusiasm. We are asked to say yes or no to a Constitution which has divided our country, not united it. The noble goal of national reconciliation has been overtaken by national malaise and by aching doubt. Instead of jubilation and a sense of achievement, we find ourselves agonizing over the threat of division and the consequence of failure.

We have been eyewitnesses to history, and what will be remembered long after we are gone is a sorry chapter in the history of a great nation, a story that has unfolded without honour and without dignity, a story that has strained relations between provinces, between groups and between people. If we could only turn the clock back and do it over again. If we knew then what we know now, how much wiser all of us would be, but there is no place for the "what ifs" and the "might have beens" of history. Now we must grapple with the realities of today as we grope to find a better future for those who will follow.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when competing emotions and seemingly endless pressure descend upon all of us in

this Chamber, we are left to hold on to those values and to those principles which motivate us as politicians.

In my own case, I rely on three anchors which represent my roots as a Canadian: federalism, liberalism and democracy.

Mr. Speaker, I am a proud Canadian federalist. Canada has always made sense to me and it began with our original people who came thousands of years before white settlers happened upon this place. We have so much to learn from Native peoples. Perhaps most of all, it is their respect for the land itself that is so firmly rooted in Native culture and tradition. Native Canadians know that we only rent the Earth, we do not own it and we do not possess it.

The French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau said that the fruits of the Earth are for everyone, the Earth itself, or no one. Native people have lived that wisdom for centuries. Their bond with the Creator and their harmony with nature are so much more enduring than the instant gratification that so grips us tenaciously in contemporary society. The cause of the Native people is just, and their cry for justice is being heard by all Canadians.

* (1200)

(Mr. William Chornopyski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I remember back to the task force hearings, I remember above all the presentation of a Native man by the name of Victor Payou—without notes, a man who had never spoken in public before and let alone in front of a television camera where thousands were watching—who spoke with simple eloquence not about the Constitution of Canada, not about this clause or that clause but what the land and the nation meant to him as a Native Canadian. Those 15 or 20 minutes, like the eloquence we heard yesterday from the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper), are spiritual strength for all of us who get caught up in the maze of legal language, competing tensions and emotions to strip all that away and to observe with respect and dignity the relationship that Native people have with their land and with their Creator.

Canada is a country of two principal language groups. English and French speaking settlers came here and they were joined by men, women and children from every corner of the globe. To them, and my own grandparents included, who escaped the terrorism of czarist Russia at the turn of the century, to come to Canada, not to Manitoba, Quebec or Nova Scotia, but to a country which would offer them, as poor as they were, the opportunity of giving their children and their grandchildren the freedom to become what they can best become and what they want to be, a country that accepted industrious people from all over the world regardless of religion or language because they knew that this vast terrain needed more people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that federalism works. I believe that federalism works for all Canadians. We share resources. We share our geographical mass as great as almost any in the world. We share political

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institutions. We share our sense of freedom and democracy.

By dint of circumstance, I found myself on American television. Why me? Because Premiers were not available and my Leader was unavailable and it was left to me to defend the principles of Canadian federalism with Mr. Parizeau on one side and Mr. Buchanan, who was an American annexationist looking for the best real estate opportunity since Alaska, on the other. As I heard Mr. Parizeau speak of the vibrance of the French language and culture of Quebec, and when I heard Mr. Parizeau speak of a new entrepreneurial class of Francophones in the province of Quebec, I paused and I thought of two things.

My first thought was, yes, and that makes us all stronger as Canadians. Am I to be threatened by a strong entrepreneurial class of Francophones in Quebec? Are we to be threatened by the vibrance and the richness of the French culture in Quebec? Is he scaring me by saying that they are emerging as a modern democratic and progressive society? No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is good for them and it is good for me as a Canadian.

My second thought which came immediately after the first was, okay, your language and culture are strong and vibrant, there is an emerging class of Francophone entrepreneurs—in a separate Quebec? In a Quebec with sovereignty association in its relationship to the rest of Canada? No, all of those things are possible and viable in a strong and united Canada, not in a separate Quebec.

At the same time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was the suggestion from the Americans that maybe Canadians after this constitutional impasse and division in our nation would think about the American option. Then we had to try to determine what is it that makes us different as Canadians to our friends to the south. The first thought is that we have managed to build this magnificent country against all of the logic of geography. If you look at the map of North America you see the Pacific Coast and then the spine of the Rocky Mountains, the breadbasket of the Prairies, the Great Lakes, the Appalachians, and the East Coast of North America. This country makes no geographic sense. This country is an act of will of people who have decided to carve for themselves on the northern half of this continent a nation different from the one to the south. One of those profound differences is the sense we have of ourselves as a nation in the world. We are not shackled with the burden of world leadership; we do not see global politics as us and them. Our history is a history of a peace loving nation which has used its power, the power of words, the power of diplomacy to bring people together, not to tear them apart, a rich history of diplomacy and peace making of which all Canadians should be proud.

We are as a nation more than the sum of our parts. We are Canadians who thrive on diversity. It is that very diversity which ought to unite us. Those of us in this Chamber who have the privilege of sitting on the Meech Lake Task Force came up with an idea. It was an idea that was expressed so simply by the Member of the western Arctic, Ethel Blondin, just a few days

ago. When you look into a Constitution, it must be as a mirror, you must see yourself. We took that vision of Canada and we said, who are we? Firstly, we are Canadians. We are Canadians that have special roots with our aboriginal peoples. We have English- and French-speaking majorities. We have people who have come here from all over the world to look for freedom and opportunity. That is Canada, that is what the Canada clause says. It is a reflection of the reality of who and what we are. When the Premier of this province and the Leaders of the Opposition Parties went to Ottawa, they had in their briefcase a noble vision of Canada, a vision that was given to us by the people of Manitoba, who above all other people in this nation have consistently spoken for Canada.

Symbols are very important in Constitutions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The symbol of Quebec's distinct society has become paramount in the minds of many Quebecers. The symbol of justice and recognition for aboriginal Canadians is what motivates their principles and their sense of betrayal at what ultimately is before us.

We have to go beyond symbols. Symbols can be distorted. The flag next to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Canadian flag, was the subject of acrimonious debate almost exactly 25 years ago. As a nation we fought over a symbol that was an expression of ourselves. We must go beyond symbols and reach out to people so that we can together build a nation which has respect for diversity.

Second, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided by the principles of liberalism. This has not been a partisan debate. One of the great values of the way this issue has played out in our province is that political leaders of all Parties have put aside partisanship. I can tell you there were moments when the impulse to throw away the non-partisan approach was overwhelming, a sense of who could break away from the three. To the credit of all three political Leaders, they knew they had an obligation and a responsibility to all Manitobans to put forth a vision of our country that arose from a democratic process, that reflected the vision of Canada for Manitoba, and politics was set aside.

* (1210)

I want to say why liberalism is one of my anchors. From Laurier to Mackenzie King to St. Laurent to Trudeau to Turner, the Liberal Party has always stood for the rights of the individual, the rights of the individual which can be in conflict with the rights of the collective or the power of the state, and that is why it was with satisfaction and pride that we embraced in our Party the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which said that all Canadians, regardless of their backgrounds, their religion or their colour had equal status under the law no matter where they lived.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not a concept or a principle that any of us can take lightly. We must always remember the power of the individual, not only in law but in action. How many of us will ever forget the symbol of one lone man in Tiananmen Square standing in front of a tank, stopping the might and the power of modern

technology by the force of justice? Who will ever forget the dignity and the grace, the courage and the strength of the MLA for Rupertsland (Mr. Harper), who acted alone to do what he believed was in the best interests of his people? I can only hope that some day I can speak as eloquently for my people as the Member for Rupertsland has spoken for his.

Liberalism means to me and I am sure to many others a respect for the rights of the individual. It is an anchor which has sustained us as Liberals since 1867 in Canada. Democracy is the fundamental belief which underpins all of our actions as legislators. We are here because of democracy. Perhaps in three years we will not be here because of democracy. What we do is something for which we are always accountable to the people who put us here. I was proud as a Manitoban to watch Manitobans from all walks of life come forward and make presentations to the Meech Lake Task Force. I was proud of the Premier of this province (Mr. Filmon); I was proud of the Leader of the Opposition (Mrs. Carstairs); I was proud of the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Doer) who said, in no uncertain terms, to an appointed Senator, that we will not muzzle the people of Manitoba. We need no advice on democratic institutions from an appointed senator who is not accountable to the people for his actions or for his behaviour.

The position that we took to Ottawa was honourable; it had the legitimacy of the people behind it. The same cannot be said for positions that were taken by other Premiers and indeed by the Government of Canada. Much has been said about the atmosphere in Ottawa. We have heard about the Prime Minister's great admission to the Globe and Mail that he waited for the right moment to "roll the dice," and we have heard the extensions of the metaphor. We have heard about the stakes that he himself created through the threat of consequence and the hothouse atmosphere that prevailed when our Leaders were in Ottawa two weeks ago. H'm! We even have the vision, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of a former quarterback, who is now the Premier of Alberta, who converted himself into a lineman and blocked Premier Wells from leaving the room.

(Mr. Speaker in the Chair)

This is how our Constitution was made; this is what we are asked to bless; this is a process that we are asked to participate in. The people of Manitoba are not to be fooled by the tactics of the Prime Minister. I have no new adjectives, I cannot be more eloquent in my commentary of how the Prime Minister has let us down as Canadians than all others who have spoken on this subject. I do not feel anger particularly; I feel sadness. I feel sadness that the one politician in this land elected to speak for all of Canada has failed, and failed so miserably, but I have faith in the democratic process. That means that the people of Canada at the first opportunity will say directly to the Prime Minister of Canada whether they approve, or whether they do not approve, of his tactics.

We now have to face alternatives. In some sense we have been asked to choose between our principles and national unity, a choice that no politician, no Canadian, must ever be asked to make. Our three Leaders came

back with a document better than the one they went with. I agree with the three Leaders that they took out of that, to quote the Premier, "rotten process as much as they could," and wisely they did not commit their caucuses to that document. Wisely, they said, we have a process in Manitoba that respects the will of the people. Wisely, they said, we will bring it back for consideration by the Legislature and by the people of Manitoba. I congratulate them. I congratulate them for that wisdom, for that unity and that sense of noble purpose under such tremendous pressure by a process no one ought ever to be exposed to again.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we must look to the future. It is now our challenge to rise above the rancour and the bitterness, the finger-pointing and the apportionment of blame. At the beginning of my remarks I said that if we knew three years ago what we know now many mistakes could have been avoided. We are wiser now and we must use that wisdom to rebuild a national will that has broken down over these three years. We need a new consensus which includes the aspirations of all Canadians. The national debate must now embrace justice for our aboriginal peoples; it must give voice to Westerners and Atlantic Canadians who look for a greater participation in the centre councils of decision in our nation. We must give a voice to the people of the northern territories who were so shamefully excluded from the process at Meech Lake. We must give all of those who look for equality for all Canadians a sense of hope, and we as well must recognize the legitimate aspirations of the people of Quebec.

It is my unyielding belief that each region of this country is best served by a strong and united Canada, but Canadian federalism can only work if there is a national will for it to survive. The Constitution does not belong to 11 First Ministers, not to 11 Governments, not to constitutional experts, not to special interest groups, but to all Canadians. If a Constitution does not enjoy the support of all Canadians, it must only fail.

Mr. Speaker, let me say just a few words to the people of Quebec.

Monsieur le président, je voudrais adresser quelques mots aux gens du Québec, une province où j'ai été étudiant et où j'ai appris à apprécier la société distincte qu'est le Québec. Je voudrais que les Québécois sachent que les gens du Manitoba désirent avoir une constitution qui reflète la réalité qu'est le Canada, un Canada fort, un Québec fort, un Manitoba fort, un pays uni.

(Translation)

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address a few words to the people of Quebec, a province where I was a student and where I learned to appreciate the distinct society that is Quebec. I would like the Quebecois to know that the people of Manitoba want to have a Constitution that reflects the reality of Canada: a strong Canada, a strong Quebec, a strong Manitoba, a united country.

(English)

Mr. Speaker, what I want to say to the people of Quebec is that there is no contradiction between a

strong Quebec and a strong Canada. It is within a united Canada that the aspirations of the people of Quebec can best be served. Even those who seek to divide our country tell us that the French language has never been stronger in Quebec. Even those who seek to divide our country tell us there is a rising entrepreneurial class in Quebec, all within a strong and a united Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to take two or three moments to say some things about some very special people. Let me first say to the members of the Meech Lake Task Force, let me say to the Minister of Justice (Mr. McCrae), that his respect for the people, his populism, his sense of belief that the people will be right, is an enduring and lasting memory for me in our deliberations together.

Let me say to the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Praznik), that his belief in an elected Senate, which I share, and his search for compromise was a noble contribution to our cause.

Let me say to the Member for Kirkfield Park (Mrs. Hammond), that her attachment to the rights of women is something that we all appreciated, and to the Member for Concordia (Mr. Doer), who always looked to the people of Quebec, who was able to sidestep those who wished to isolate, always reaching out to others.

Most of all to my Leader, the Member for River Heights (Mrs. Carstairs), a woman of tremendous character and strength, a woman who has carried a fight for three years when it was a lonely one, a persuasive leader, a woman of candor, of honesty, a woman of integrity, a woman who has carried a load far greater than most of us will ever be asked to carry. To all of those people, Mr. Speaker, I say, thank you.

* (1220)

To the Premier (Mr. Filmon) of this province and the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Doer), who have shown such a willingness to share their innermost thoughts against the grain of partisanship. It must have been hard sometimes for these three Leaders to speak with one voice. I am sure that the stories will come out in the fullness of time. I am sure there are sidebars and chapters to this story that we will see unfold over the weeks and months and years.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): What you see is what you get.

Mr. Carr: The Premier says what we see is what we get. I have an idea we are going to see more of what we got.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I conclude in this historic debate I say a final thank you to the Members of this Legislature who may or may not be asked down the road to make the most important decision of their political lives. I say to all of us who have withstood the pressures—and the pressures are competing. You sit on your phone and you wonder who is going to be on the other end of the line next. You never know quite for sure. It could be somebody telling you that if you vote against this accord you will be doing the will of the people and it

is your responsibility. It is a flawed document. How dare you say yes to that badly flawed process. Then the next time the phone rings it is someone else who says you must vote for the accord, if you do not vote for this accord you are ruining a great country.

I know that I speak for every Member of this House when I reflect those competing pressures. It is not simply good enough to put your finger to the wind and see where the majority is to determine how you are going to vote. That is not the way our system works, Mr. Speaker. We consult the people. We become as informed as we can, but then our consciences only must be our guides and we will be judged by the people for the decisions we make.

This has been an exhausting time. I cannot imagine how exhausting it must be for the Premier (Mr. Filmon), the Leader of the Opposition (Mrs. Carstairs) and the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Doer). I know how exhausting it has been for me.

Little did we know when we were elected two and a half years ago, 19 of us on this side of the House for the first time, that we would be brought to a moment where really the burden of the nation was on our shoulders. We realize that political life is not all glory. We realize that decisions we are asked to make can be wrenching decision and regardless of what we do there will be people angry with us. No matter what we do people will be angry with us. Our ability to withstand that anger and that pressure, I guess resolves finally on our anchors that I spoke of earlier, for me the anchors of federalism, liberalism and democracy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if there would be agreement to sit beyond 12:30?

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to sit beyond 12:30? No? No, there is no leave.

The Honourable Government House Leader.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Speaker, by leave, I move, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness), that when the House adjourns today it shall stand adjourned until a time fixed by Mr. Speaker, upon the request of the Government.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved, by leave, by the Honourable Government House Leader (Mr. McCrae), seconded by the Honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Manness), that when the House adjourns today it shall stand adjourned until a time fixed by Mr. Speaker, upon the request of the Government. Agreed? Agreed.

Is it the will of the House to call it 12:30? (Agreed)

The hour being 12:30, this House is now adjourned.

(O CANADA WAS SUNG)