

Message to the people by Robert Bourassa, Prime Minister of Québec, following the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, June 23, 1990.

[Translation]

My dear fellow citizens, we now stand at a crucial moment in our history. The decision to reject the Meech Lake Accord stirs new doubts regarding our political future. Why is this so? For the next few moments, it is worthwhile to review the events of this past decade. We all recall that on May 20, 1980, Quebecers voted to have Québec remain within the Canadian federation. This referendum came after 20 years of significant progress. We also recall that 30 years ago yesterday, Québec's Quiet Revolution began which allowed its assertion socially, culturally and economically. After the referendum, the administration that preceded ours, as I mentioned yesterday, made important efforts to assure Québec's place within the Constitution. Finally in 1985, to make it possible to settle the constitutional issue at least regarding the part for reintegrating Québec, we laid down five conditions, no more no less, without any reservations for making deals. As the Opposition Leader so correctly stated, the government of Québec and its First Minister were in the position of taking a risk with history. They took the risk, as I said a few months back, of being accused of lack of concern regarding the reintegration of Québec in Canada. We took this risk because we believed that was essential that Québec regain its political stability.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Parizeau for his support yesterday evening. Québec is always stronger when it is united.

This determination to find our place within the Canadian family was therefore

performed with moderation. If we were moderate, it was because we wanted to succeed, but at the same time this moderation was to be a test of English Canada's willingness to understand Québec. As such, for three years we exercised patience and openness. In June 1987, the agreement was ratified for the first time. It had been ratified previously on the basis of principles in April 1987. Two weeks ago, once again, it was accepted. We even agreed upon a second round of negotiations, to the preparation of a second round of negotiations. Throughout all this, it must not be forgotten that in August 1986, all the first ministers were in agreement to give priority to the issue of Québec.

Two weeks later, two premiers were unable to respect their signature. Premier Filmon, because of the question we all know, the obstruction by one Member, and Premier Wells who decided not to respect his signature. I was surprised and very disappointed. Mr. Wells is considered to be a man of principles. But how could you conciliate his principles with the fact that he is refusing to respect his signature? He criticized strongly the Prime Minister for his actions during the Conference and after. But in not respecting his signature, he has no lessons to give on the grounds of principles to the Prime Minister.

In this respect, the Prime Minister of Canada was also accused of using all sorts of tactics to successfully reintegrate Québec. I witnessed the efforts of the Prime Minister of Canada for one full week, during the dozens and dozens of hours that he devoted to convincing all his colleagues to accept the Meech Lake Accord. He did not do as some of his predecessors had done, who successfully struck a constitutional agreement by keeping Quebec out of the deal. These are the same people who, yesterday, were criticizing the Prime Minister of Canada. Politics can sometimes be quite

bizarre and in these circumstances, ungrateful for the Prime Minister of Canada.

As regards manipulations, it's curious that no one mentioned this probability or hypothesis in the case of Amerindians, no one, especially in English Canada. Yet it is a well-known fact that by a killing the Meech Lake Accord, we're only delaying the solution of the native peoples problem.

This leads me to express and make known to you the decisions of my administration following this failure. One outcome to be concluded from these negotiations is that the constitutional review process as it exists in Canada is discredited. The government of Québec does not accept to return to the negotiating table on constitutional matters. There is no question of discussing Senate reform, or discussing the Canada Clause, and unfortunately no question of also discussing constitutional reform that could involve the Amerindians.

How can you expect me to accept returning to the constitutional table when I refused to do so in 1986 before the beginning of negotiations on the Meech Lake Accord? How could I return to the table now that the accords have been rejected, after having been ratified? In addition, the position of my government from now on is to negotiate bilaterally and not with eleven entities, to negotiate with the Canadian government that represents the entire population of Canada, bilateral negotiations between the government of Québec and the federal government.

Obviously, we will have negotiations with other provinces on a bilateral basis. It is also obvious that we may decide to participate in some conferences where Québec's interests are at stake, but never on constitutional matters. In the current context, I have decided not to participate in the conference to be held in Winnipeg during the month of August, which each year brings provincial first ministers together.

With the rejecting of the Meech Lake Accord, the Liberal Party of Québec's program was likewise rejected. We now need a new program and it is normal that we take the time to discuss this matter with Liberal Party militants, also to listen to representations that may be made by various popular groups, in forums that remain to be organized. Meanwhile, the government of Québec intends on activating certain administrative issues that are important for Québec. In particular, I am thinking of the immigration issue. We're very close to an agreement. We know how vital is for the future of Québec in immigration matters to be able to have additional powers allowing us to consolidate our security in communications and in issues regarding manpower training.

Dear friends, in conclusion I wish to say to you that in all these decisions and those to come, the superior interest of Québec will be the determining factor. And in this respect in all these decisions, we will take into account the economic dimension. On four occasions, Quebecers have elected me to be their Premier. One of the main reasons for this, and I say this humbly, is the priority that I've always given to reinforcing the Québec economy; that the strength of Québec, in my view, always begins with its economic force. And we have many advantages in this respect. It will therefore be necessary that in these important decisions for our future, that the economic dimension be primordial. It will also be necessary to take into account the dynamic energies of our cultural communities, of the historic and irreplaceable part played by the Anglophone community in Québec society, as well as the assistance that we may provide to French-Speaking Communities outside Québec.

In the preparation of its future, Québec has many very important advantages, and in this preparation that will be one of our main priorities over the coming months,

we have these advantages connected to the exceptional quality of our labour force, connected to the dynamic force of our business people, the abundance of our natural resources and the exceptionally strategic position of Québec's geography in Canada and North America.

All in all, Québec is free to make its choices. But it must make its choice with realism, serenity and lucidity. As for myself, I wish to assure you that my only orientation will be the superior interest of the people of Québec. Thank you very much.

Source: Text of the message.