

"Life after Meech" — suggestions are pouring in

A couple of weeks ago I wrote here about our country's ongoing constitutional conflict. Since then, we had a couple of public meetings on "Life after Meech", which turned out to be emotional and yet thoughtful events.

There were certainly people who came because they were angry. Angry at Quebec, the feds, the prime minister, Bourassa or politicians in general. Some feel this whole problem didn't need to happen, while others think the mood of Quebec is such that it was inevitable.

I don't pretend to have the answers. But I am spending a lot of time listening. At the meetings I gave out pages of paper asking for peoples' thoughts on Canada. And I mentioned in this column that those pages will go into a "Canada Book" which will travel back to Ottawa with me. Also in the book will be any letters or statements people here have on the subject of our country.

Well, every day more of them arrive at my office - each one another piece of evidence that regular people from all walks of life care very much about Canada.

Here are some samples from the growing pile.

"I feel sorry for Bourassa, since he has the Parti Quebecois to deal with," R. Nurse writes from Georgetown. "But can we allow the PQ to upset the whole country? If they gain power in the next provincial election, there is a possibility the province will separate. Meech could not have prevented that."

"I do not want my country divided, but there comes a limit to the concessions which can be made to one sector when they in turn refuse to make any."

"Right now," says Dorothy James from Glen Williams, "people on both sides are hurt and angry. It's like two sisters fighting with each other, both saying things to hurt each other. But I have the feeling that if some other party were to attack either side, we would join together just like feuding families do."

"If Quebec separates from the rest of Canada," adds Bill Bracken from outside Alton, "they should be made to take their share of the deficit. They should not receive any more financial assistance from the federal government. Quebec's separation should be looked upon as a bird leaving the nest - you're on your own now, wing it the best way you can."

"I personally don't want to see Quebec separate, but I also feel quite adamant about what I have just written."

From Burlington, Graham Gilmour tells me we need "responsible politicians who can remember a Canada they were proud to belong to."

"By all means welcome all legal immigrants without criminal records to share our land provided they accept Canada as an English-speaking country with traditions and a culture that is sacrosanct."

"Can you remember how good it felt to stand at attention and sing our national anthem? Can you say today that it still stirs your heart-strings, or are you like so many of us who feel that it is no longer our country, and we no longer even care?"

"Can we not agree," asks A. Combe of Acton, "to respect each other's language and culture without bringing politics into it? I agree that French and English are the founding languages. So be it."



Let us practice the language of our choice without government intervention.
"It is my belief that 'english' Canada did not reject 'french' Canada. They rejected legislation denying it the freedom of choice. Do away with the words multiculturalism, bilingualism and promote in its place Canadianism."

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Mildred Sharpe, of Bolton, says Quebec "has always wanted separation and always will, no matter how much we give them, it will never be enough. There is a large number of MPs in Ottawa now who said if Meech Lake didn't pass they would reconsider their positions, but now say they will stay to best serve Quebec. I hope they are also serving the rest of the country fairly."

Albert Dewdney, of Glen Williams, says, "It would seem that the only long-term solution is to give the French their 'head,' as a parent might in desperation give way to an adolescent child, unless and until reason and intelligence should prevail."

His wife, Margaret, adds, "In attempting to assess the future of our Canadian society, three points are mandatory. We must evaluate, we must tolerate and we must appreciate what this country means to us."

And this, from Ken McPherson, of Georgetown: "We can only be saved only by a generosity of heart."

What do you think?

Do we negotiate with Quebec to keep Canada whole? How do we respond to the next set of demands - which will surely make Meech look mild? Do we risk breaking this country up, or has English Canada been pushed around too much?

Do we understand each other? What kind of Canada should come out of this?

Please write your thoughts for the Canada Book, and for me.

The address: Garth Turner, MP, 27 Main St. S., Georgetown, L7G 3G2.

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