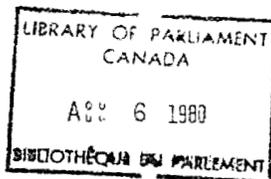


MEETING OF THE CONTINUING COMMITTEE
OF MINISTERS ON THE CONSTITUTION

Opening Statement by the Quebec
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs
Mr. Claude Morin



Montreal, Quebec
July 8-11, 1980

GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC
DEPARTMENT OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
MINISTER'S OFFICE

CONTINUING COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS ON THE CONSTITUTION

Opening statement by the Quebec Minister of Intergovernmental
Affairs, Mr Claude Morin

At the outset of our deliberations, on behalf of the Quebec delegation, I would like to set out the spirit and the perspective in which we approach the present round of constitutional negotiations.

1. Meaning of the Quebec Referendum

At the referendum of May 20, the people of Quebec did not give its government a mandate to negotiate with the rest of Canada an agreement based on sovereignty-association. As we have stated since, as well as before and during the referendum campaign, we have democratically accepted the result of the referendum and we shall act accordingly. This means therefore that there is no question at our trying to achieve, through the exercise we are now beginning upon, the political objective that Quebecers did not support in May.

By expressing themselves as they did, Quebecers did not, however, opt for the status quo - to the contrary - and, still less did they opt for any decrease in Quebec's powers. All the NO spokesmen agreed at the time that a NO vote really meant YES to the in-depth reform of the present political system.

And if we are meeting here today, so soon after the Referendum, the reason is that there is a general feeling - at least we presume so - that a suitable substance must now be given to the Referendum result. In other words, henceforth, Quebecers wish to measure the real, tangible, concrete dimension of the promises of renewal supposedly implicit in the NO vote.

II Quebecers' expectations

The negotiations we are about to begin upon are meaningful only if they lead to real change along the lines sought by Quebec.

Constitutional reform raises considerable expectations in Quebec. For fifteen years now, all attempts at revising the constitution have failed, and, every time, Quebecers have been disappointed. Why? Because, every time, the real problems have been sidestepped, and we have ended up by concentrating on disparate side issues or topics of very limited scope in relation to Quebecers' fundamental difficulties, which justified, for Quebec, the in-depth revision of our political structure.

And so we begin once again another round of constitutional talks. These talks are a direct result of the Quebec Referendum, even if several of the problems to be resolved are common to other provinces as well as Quebec: this is a fact of which we are perfectly aware.

What do we Quebecers expect from the resumption of negotiations?

First that they firmly, openly and clearly take account of what might be regarded as a common denominator

among Quebecers: that for us Quebec is a distinct society that wishes to be recognized as such, that it is free to decide on its future, and that it is determined to keep in and for Quebec and to acquire when they are lacking, the cultural, economic and linguistic tools through which it can affirm itself and develop according to its own aspirations and needs.

Next, we expect these negotiations to lead to clarification in the sharing of powers and a significant decrease in federal-provincial duplication of services.

Finally, we expect these negotiations to confirm that, within the federal system, the central government regards the provinces not as regional administrative entities to be kept under constant surveillance but as major responsible partners in whom confidence can and must be shown.

In short, Quebecers expect, following the Referendum and the promises made to them, that there be clear proof on the federal side of really significant progress in the constitutional deadlock.

They expect to find, on the federal side, an original, imaginative approach to solving problems so old that they are somehow a part of an ongoing dispute. Otherwise, Quebecers will feel that they have been had.

III Quebec's attitude

As we have only two months before us in which to try to reach agreement on subjects, some of which have been under fruitless discussion for years,

it is understandable that the list of questions to be studied is somewhat short. Quebec will not, however, accept that the short deadline be used as a convenient excuse to postpone until later discussion of subjects of interest to the provinces, on the pretext that they are complex, while greater attention is paid to questions considered as top priority by Ottawa. The shortness of the list forces us to leave aside topics that are even more important than those to be discussed - Quebec could cite several of these - and which often have a direct and immediate influence on the topics for discussion. In addition, ten of the twelve items in our programme are not new since they are taken in full from the agendas of previous conferences from 1968 to 1979.

These reservations in no way affect the positive, open spirit in which we approach the present negotiations.

- 1- We are here, as is right and proper, to defend the rights and interests of Quebecers without, for all that, disregarding those of the other citizens of Canada. Our will for affirmation is coupled with a will to understand.
- 2- We are also here to reach agreement on as many issues as possible. In short, we want results.
- 3- We will put forward and defend our viewpoints always with the aim that the eventual results of negotiations reflect the concrete expectations of Quebecers.

- 4- Our prime concern, as has always been the case for Quebec for fifteen years now, remains the federal-provincial sharing of powers. In this respect we hold to the unanimous interprovincial consensus reached by the provincial premiers in Regina in August 1978.
- 5- For each of the items under consideration, we shall present for discussion specific proposals, the content of which corresponds, in our view, to the general will of Quebecers.
- 6- Because we are absolutely determined that the people be adequately informed, we shall consider it our duty to make these proposals public as soon as they are brought forward to the negotiating table. We shall obviously respect the discretion required with regard to the views expressed by one or other of the governments.
- 7- We shall take advantage of a Parliamentary Commission to be held in Quebec City on August 14 and 15 to present an interim report on negotiations to date, and to take stock of the situation with our colleagues in the Quebec National Assembly.

Montreal, July 8, 1980.