

MEECH LAKE COMMUNIQUE OF APRIL 30, 1987

At their meeting today at Meech Lake, the Prime Minister and the ten Premiers agreed to ask officials to transform into a constitutional text the agreement in principle found in the attached document.

First Ministers also agreed to hold a constitutional conference within weeks to approve a formal text intended to allow Quebec to resume its place as a full participant in Canada's constitutional development.

QUEBEC'S DISTINCT SOCIETY

- (1) The Constitution of Canada shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with
 - a) the recognition that the existence of French-speaking Canada, centred in but not limited to Quebec, and English-speaking Canada, concentrated outside Quebec but also present in Quebec, constitutes a fundamental characteristic of Canada; and
 - b) the recognition that Quebec constitutes within Canada a distinct society.
- (2) Parliament and the provincial legislatures, in the exercise of their respective powers, are committed to preserving the fundamental characteristic of Canada referred to in paragraph (1)(a).
- (3) The role of the legislature and Government of Quebec to preserve and promote the distinct identity of Quebec referred to in paragraph (1)(b) is affirmed.

Meech Lake Accord

Description

The Meech Lake Accord was an agreement between the federal and the provincial governments to try to amend the Constitution by making the provincial powers stronger and by also having Quebec being declared a distinct society. It was made in 1987 when Brian Mulroney, the Progressive Conservative government attempted to win Quebec's consent to the revised Canadian Constitution after the Quebec government had it previously rejected in 1981. Later, political support was unravelled and the project fell apart thus never being put in account.

Cause

The Meech Lake Accord was intended to persuade Quebec's government so they would symbolically endorse the 1982 constitutional amendments by giving some decentralization of the Canadian federation. It was popular at first and was thus backed by multiple political leaders in Canada but Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau along with Aboriginal groups and feminist activists were concerned about the lack of citizen involvement in the Accord's drafting and worried about the future impact it would have on Canadian federalism.

Did Meech Lake Accord create awareness for aboriginal rights?

Canada was all into the process of approving the new Constitution but unfortunately it was very controversial among aboriginal people because the issue of discussing aboriginal rights hadn't been discussed yet. As the deadline lurked near, Elijah Harper, a member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly was approached by the Chief of the Assembly of the Manitoba Chiefs with the aboriginal concerns. After hearing him, Harper agreed to help the aboriginals. The Meech Lake Accord did create a large amount of awareness for aboriginal rights because the needs and rights of the aboriginals were being brought out by large political leaders who wanted to make sure the agreement suited everyone equally, especially the aboriginals. Through the course of weekend, Brian Mulroney and the Prime Minister got in touch with Harper and the Assembly of the Manitoba Chiefs and he then arranged a meeting with them and he was sending them to Winnipeg from Ottawa and on June 18, 1990 they met and they were rejected. Eventually, the project fell apart but it did create significant awareness for aboriginals and their rights.

Significance

This was a significant time in Aboriginal history because it was one of the first times in history that aboriginal rights were eventually realized as a top priority by some top political leaders. The Meech Lake Accord was significant because even though it was never fully realized it still was significant because aboriginals fought for their rights along with top political leaders and they were eventually realized and it was known that aboriginals were just as important as any other ethnicity.

Discussion Questions:

Why were the aboriginal's right not a top priority a first?

What was the point of the Meech Lake Accord?

