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November 14, 1980

Special Joint Committee on the Constitution of Canada  
Postal Box 1044  
South Block  
Parliament Buildings  
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Sirs:

We would like to bring to the attention of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House a petition regarding nations and languages in Canada. This petition, signed by 60,395 people from all regions of Canada, is highly relevant to the debate on constitutional reform.

Presented in the form of a Declaration and drawn up by the Marxist-Leninist Organization of Canada In Struggle, this petition calls for recognition of the absolute equality of languages and nations in Canada. Since this demand has been supported by more than 60,000 individuals, we feel it is our right to be heard before the Special Joint Committee.

The fact that this point of view is diametrically opposed to that contained in the document entitled "A Proposed Resolution for a Joint Address to Her Majesty the Queen respecting the Constitution of Canada" is all the more reason for giving it a hearing. It is thus on behalf of those tens of thousands of people whose signatures we have gathered, despite the limited means at our disposal, that we seek to appear before the Committee.

One might be tempted to argue that those who have subscribed to the idea of the equality of all languages and nations have subscribed to little more than an abstract and inapplicable, albeit worthy, principle.

However, our petition is particularly careful to explain the concrete implications of such a demand. Recognition of the absolute equality of languages and nations means a number of things:

1- Recognition of the absolute equality of languages and nations means full recognition of the fact that the Francophones of Quebec constitute a nation. The denial of this national right of Quebecers is manifest in the fact that the Quebec nation has historically been maintained in a position inferior to that of the English Canadian nation and has suffered various forms of discrimination. The history of Canada abounds in examples of oppression and discrimination against Quebecers:

- the Act of Union in 1840 joining Upper and Lower Canada, which granted privileges to the minority Anglophone province to guarantee its political and legislative hegemony following the 1837 Rebellion;
- Confederation in 1867, when Quebec was incorporated in the new country without any consultation of its people;
- the bloody repression of Quebecers' opposition to conscription during the two world wars;
- the economic and social inferiority of Quebecers as revealed in the Laurendeau-Dunton report;
- the 1970 War Measures Act and so on.

2- Recognition of the absolute equality of languages and nations means formal recognition upon which the Canadian people may rely in taking up the struggle against all forms of discrimination or privilege based on inclusion in a nation or national minority. Some will argue that putting all languages and nations in Canada on an equal footing would lead to a latter-day Tower of Babel. In fact, it is by attempting to force Canadian unity, recognizing specific

official languages, refusing to recognize national rights (such as those of native peoples) and limiting the linguistic rights of minorities, that the government will perpetuate the current divisive situation.

- 3- Recognition of the absolute equality of languages and nations means recognition of the inalienable right of the Quebec nation to determine its own political future, including the establishment of a separate state if such be the will of the majority. In other words, it means recognizing that Quebecers constitute a nation; that they have their own history, a common language, their own civic institutions; that they share a deep sense of national identity as well as the political desire to safeguard this identity. Thus a refusal to allow Quebecers the right to form an independent state if they so desire, would be a blow struck for division, not unity.

We wish to be heard not only because more than 60,000 people have endorsed the Declaration for the Absolute Equality of Languages and Nations, but also because its call is being echoed by more and more members of national minority groups within our society. The "Trudeau Resolution", in contrast, recognizes no rights for any nation or national minority, be they Quebecers, Francophones outside Quebec, native peoples or others. Indeed, this resolution recognizes rights in connection with only two languages, English and French - and even so French-language rights outside Quebec are limited to the right of schooling "where numbers warrant".

Far from bolstering the unity of the Canadian people as it claims to do, the "Trudeau Resolution" succeeds merely in fuelling the fires of division. Only recognition of the equality of all languages and nations in the Canadian Constitution will give the Canadian people the opportunity to make their national and linguistic claims heard.

In closing, we must reiterate the fact that the views presented above are shared by more than 60,000 individuals,

and that as a result we consider we have the right to express these views publicly before the Special Joint Committee. It must also be realized that the many demands being made by the native peoples, the Acadians, the Fransaskois, the Franco-Ontarians, the Franco-Manitobans and so on, all have one common denominator: they all represent efforts to combat discrimination and inequality. It is therefore not only fundamental but urgent that a section guaranteeing the equality of languages and nations be written into the Canadian Constitution. It is in order to defend this point of view that we request an opportunity to appear before your Committee.

Yours truly,

Jean-Pierre Sauv   
for the MLOC IN STRUGGLE

\* We are enclosing with this letter a large proportion of the 60,395 signatures we have gathered, as well as the text of the Declaration for the Absolute Equality of Languages and Nations in Canada.

\*\* We may also be reached at: Presses de l'Unit   
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