

*Government Orders*

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu):** Five minutes left for questions and comments. Any more comments?

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

**Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, of course I intend to support the government's new proposals for Canada's cultural sector.

When I hear the opposition condemning the very existence of Canada and the fact that Canada has done nothing for the French fact, I think that is absolutely untrue and unacceptable. Some people are looking for a definition of the Canadian nation, and it seems that originally, Canada was a word that meant "village" in one of the aboriginal languages. A village is a community where people live together, and these people have worked together to build a country.

I may remind the opposition that this Canada, this village we have created is the envy of the world. I could refer again to the view shared by the United Nations that Canada still ranks first as the best country to live in.

Consider how Canada developed. The first colonists who came to Canada wanted to make a new life for themselves. My ancestors, as those of the member for Quebec with whom I share the same surname, landed on the île d'Orléans in 1642. My ancestor, Maturin Gagnon, one of the first French settlers, wanted to start a new life. Obviously, through the years, there has been many changes and historical upsets, but I believe that Canada and its very existence as a country, has made it possible for the Canadian Francophonie to thrive.

I believe that this fact must not be ignored. I believe that the nature of Canada, as a state, resides in its linguistic duality, and the generous reception given to the cultures which have contributed to the development and the building of this structure called Canada. Among those who came were the Irish, the Scots, the Jews, the Asians and the Europeans, to name a few. People from 160 countries have contributed, in one way or another, to the creation and the building of the Canadian federation.

There are 6 million francophones in Quebec, more than one million of whom are new Quebecers, and anglophones who also contributed to the development of Quebec, as part of Canada, of course. Everybody was the better for it: Montreal became the first metropolis of the Canadian federation. The river brought people to Montreal, but I do not want to focus on the past, I want to speak of the future. This is the spirit of a true Canadian: someone who looks towards the next century.

And there are over half a million francophones in Ontario. A third of the population of New Brunswick is made up of francophones. There are tens of thousands of francophones in Manitoba and in the western provinces. They are there, they exist, they are counting on the support of francophones in Quebec to keep this country united.

• (1335)

I would go even further. Unfortunately, nationalists never take into account the contributions of francophones outside Quebec. Carmen Roy was not even mentioned. There is Angèle Arsenault, Édith Butler, even Roch Voisine. These are francophones outside Quebec who not only ensure in some way the French presence outside Quebec but could also be considered as some of the greatest figures of French culture in Canada.

I told you about the francophones outside Quebec but not about the success of bilingualism. Some vainly tried to prove quasi scientifically that bilingualism does not work. But there are more than 4.4 million Canadians who master both languages. I had the opportunity to go to Vancouver, where I made a speech to young people who, much to my surprise, spoke a more than proper French. This was music to my ear. I also received well written correspondence in French.

We must not forget that, in 1977, 237 schools offered an immersion program to 37,835 students. In 1988—these are Anglophone students registered in immersion programs—there were 1,500 schools and 241,140 students. Within ten years, bilingual and immersion programs increased by 700 per cent. I think what makes French so vital and attractive is the growing interest of many young English Canadians for the beautiful language of Molière.

Certain people have attempted to minimize and trivialize the efforts made by some provinces, but they overlooked the fact that more than 27,000 students in British Columbia, more than 26,000 in Alberta, 18,000 in Manitoba, and even 115,000 in Ontario go to immersion schools. It is very interesting to travel in English Canada and meet these young people who were able to benefit from this program. And believe me, Madam Speaker, these young people are very grateful for it.

Canada has an international reputation as a leader, for the way it treats its minorities, be they francophones outside Quebec or anglophones in Quebec. Of course, there are other minorities and, to me, this makes the strength of this country. This diversity of cultures, this meeting place of ideas, Madam Speaker, that is what Canada is all about.

**Some hon. members:** They do not even have washrooms.

**Mr. Gagnon:** Well, my friend, let me tell you something about washrooms. In the Magdalen Islands, there is a small English school for which the province of Quebec is responsible but it refuses to grant the money needed to rebuild this school used by English-speaking children. The school has water and electrical problems and the window panes are broken. It no longer meets the needs of the population but unfortunately the Government of Quebec is waiting for the Government of Canada to foot the bill and build a school for these English-speaking children. That is how some minorities are treated in Quebec.