

The Address

The hon. member for Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis reminded us that Mauritius and Canada had had a similar history, telling us how important it is for him that Canada preserves—as Mauritius did—its reputation as a land of freedom. However, one should remember that before joining the Canadian Federation, Quebec was also a land of freedom, a land of belief, a land of respect—respect for the established order, for men and women, for the family, for the fundamental and traditional values that had made Quebecers—whose ancestors were French—a noble people, proud of its origins.

When Quebecers decided to join the Canadian Federation, they did not do so because they believed they would give themselves new fundamental values they did not have yet; Quebecers decided to join the Canadian Federation because they wanted to develop their own values and to share them with another people, the English Canadians.

Today, when Quebecers are thinking of another way of living, they do not do so because they have something against their partners of 1867 or because they despise English-speaking people; they do so because they now fear the system they had accepted to be part of since that time. They think that system may deprive them from now on of their right to speak, their fundamental values, their traditions and their culture. They are concerned that the Canadian Federation will no more enable them to maintain this heritage they received not from the Canadian Federation but from their forefathers long before the Canadian Federation.

• (1845)

Why is it that the hon. member believes that if Quebec should become sovereign all of a sudden, he would lose all his rights?

Why does he think that if it became sovereign tomorrow, Quebec would not enjoy those same privileges? Does he believe that the Canadian Federation is the only guardian of the fundamental rights of Quebec and that without that federation, without those fundamental values, Quebec does not have a future anymore? I would like the hon. member for Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis to make some further comments on that, because I do not think that those values were given to Quebecers by virtue of the Canadian Federation. Those were values that they already enjoyed before they entered Confederation.

Mr. Lincoln: I do not know how the hon. member could conclude that I said Quebecers had no basic freedoms and no sense of family or values. I never said that. The point I made was that we have been together for nearly two and half centuries. We decided of our own free will, the French-speaking population and the English-speaking population, to join together in the

Canadian federation. And the same thing happened when Saskatchewan and British Columbia and others joined the Canadian federation. This does not mean there were no basic freedoms before. However, together we have built a country that is the envy of many nations because of its sense of freedom and democracy, which is particularly true given your presence here. That we can be here, like this, is tremendous. I think it is very exciting to have colleagues from all over the world, who enjoy every freedom here, and that I myself, who was born elsewhere, am here as a Canadian and a Quebecer and proud of it and, as part of the Canadian system, am able to enjoy a measure of freedom that is the envy of the other countries of this world.

I am not saying that if it happens to be the democratic choice of some Quebecers not to go their own way, that basic freedoms would crumble. I never said that. I never even mentioned it. My point was that what we have here, what we have built here together is something that is far greater and has far more scope than would be the case if we were to retreat behind our walls and do something that will deny the reality of people like the hon. member for Beauséjour who is also a francophone and wants to belong to this great francophone family within Canada.

That is why we must continue to defend the vision of those pioneers who looked well beyond the borders of Quebec. The St. Lawrence is the epitome of Quebec's culture and history. But why would Quebecers not be entitled to the Great Lakes as well? And why would Canadians living on the Great Lakes not be entitled to the St. Lawrence? That is my theory. Freedoms will continue to exist, both in Quebec and elsewhere, but I hope they will exist within a much broader and more exciting context than Canada. That is why I intend to fight very hard to defend those freedoms.

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac): Madam Speaker, I knew the hon. member for Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis, when he was in the National Assembly. I met him in Lac-Mégantic, a town not very far from my riding. I talked with him then and I was under the impression that he cared a great deal for Quebec. He was Minister of the Environment. That is why I was very disappointed by his speech where, despite the fact that he has been Minister of the Environment in Quebec and should make environment his priority, he barely talked about it.

• (1850)

What I would like to ask to the hon. member for Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis, who is parliamentary secretary to the Minister of the Environment, is whether he will push to have the North American Commission on Environmental Co-operation, created under NAFTA, in Montreal? It was agreed during the Rio Summit, with the Mayor of Montreal, that his city would be a centre for the environment.