

The Constitution

convinced. We were told for many months last year how useful it was to have Conservative governments in every province. This now seems less useful when we need the help of the members opposite.

We are running out of time and there is lobbying to be done, no longer by national groups or Quebec members—they have shown us their generosity and I thank them for their efforts—but it is now up to us, the citizens of Ontario, to tell the Premier of our province, our provincial representatives and all the candidates in the provincial election, the Canadian government—

[English]

—and above all we must convince the English majority in Ontario that our language rights in Ontario must be guaranteed in our new Canadian Constitution.

An hon. Member: Why not put an amendment?

Mr. Chénier: It seems that the hon. member who has the floor over there, Mr. Speaker, does not understand what I am saying. I am asking the province of Ontario to take the lead. Ontario's citizens must be convinced that such French-language guarantees in health and legal services, in education, in our own school boards and other services dispensed by the province of Ontario will take nothing away from the English majority. On the contrary, it will affirm the same rights enjoyed by the English minority in Quebec for more than a century. Where is the justice there? Above all, it will demonstrate once again the maturity of our country and of our province in respect of an understanding and appreciation of our cultural and linguistic differences, although we are of the north.

There is one thing which still amazes me when we talk of rights and guarantees. I notice every day the struggle of some local groups in my constituency who to this day feel that such things as official languages and language rights do not apply outside this chamber or outside the law books. For example, a community college board has been arguing for months whether to approve and display the French name of the college along with the English one in order to attract more of the 43 per cent French population it should serve. To this day the matter is not resolved because members of the board have not understood that such decisions should be spontaneous, and not deliberated to death, to express immediate understanding and acceptance of our important French-speaking minority, and that minority in my riding, I repeat, amounts to 43 per cent.

[Translation]

It is not too late for this minority to speak out. Acadians did so collectively in New Brunswick and Premier Hatfield has served them well. The rights of Acadians will be entrenched in our new Constitution. There is still time to rally public opinion in favour of a bilingual Ontario. I shall continue to speak of this noble and historic resolution proposal to various groups in my constituency. I urge all Ontario members to do the same. Let us shake public opinion! With the mandate of our constitu-

ents, we shall then be able to tell the Ontario premier, whoever he may be, that the Ontario people want to ensure that the new Canadian Constitution will guarantee once and for all the linguistic rights of the francophone minority.

[English]

In conclusion, I should like to say that Canada will be a better place as a result of this resolution. We will have our own Constitution with an amending formula which respects the principles of federalism without entrenching paralysis, a formula which respects the special needs of Quebec as well as protecting the interests of the other regions. We will enjoy the protection of an entrenched charter of rights which will enable any Canadian to seek justice through the transient prevailing attitudes of the legislatures. I would reiterate that this charter applies equally to both federal and provincial legislatures. This charter in all its beauty takes the custody of our basic rights and freedoms out of the hands of government, which have shown in the past they are capable of legislating in a discriminatory manner, and places that trust with independent courts.

This is a vibrant time in our history, a time of great debate on the future viability of our nation. I firmly believe the provisions of this resolution go a long way toward resolving the many inherent problems of a federal system such as ours. Rather than divide us, I believe that, once the storm of debate has passed, Canada will emerge as a paragon of democracy and, above all, a free and completely independent nation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mayer: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member for Timmins-Chapleau (Mr. Chénier) would entertain a question?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the parliamentary secretary wish to accept a question?

Mr. Chénier: Mr. Speaker, I would rather have other speakers address the House.

Mr. Nielsen: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chénier) would accept a question from me in the eight minutes of his remaining time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member wish to accept a question?

Mr. Chénier: I would repeat what I said before, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bill Yurko (Edmonton East): Mr. Speaker, I first want to take this opportunity as a member of this House to welcome President Reagan to Canada today. I, like most Canadians, am distressed at the lack of courtesy displayed by a very small minority in front of the assembly today.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!