

Clearly the mission of the Department of Canadian Heritage is closely linked to the major issues facing Canada today. Our agenda is very full and our mission extends into many sectors of Canadian society.

It is more important now than ever before to start thinking of Canada's cultural complexity as an asset in an age when openness to rest of the world is as important as the preservation of our identities. That is where the Department of Canadian Heritage comes in. The Department of Canadian Heritage does not deal exclusively with the past, but it is focused on the future. It is at the nerve centre of the major challenges facing contemporary society.

The department I have the honour of overseeing must have official legal status if it is to continue its work of fostering the emergence of a strong cultural identity in Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata): Madam Speaker, the Canadian government is coming to the House of Commons today for second reading of Bill C-53, an act to establish the Department of Canadian Heritage and to amend and repeal certain other acts.

First of all, the surprising thing is that the government took nearly a year to draft Bill C-53, which for all practical purposes confirms what Prime Minister Kim Campbell announced when her cabinet was sworn in in the summer of 1993. In so doing, the present Prime Minister and his government are confirming the same mistakes in decisions made by the previous government when for economic reasons Ms. Campbell decided to reduce the size of cabinet and merge several departments; among those decisions was the creation of the Department of Canadian Heritage. This is totally unacceptable, both for Canadians and for Quebecers.

At first glance, this bill seems to be a purely technical measure that should pass quickly without lengthy debate, since its primary purpose is to establish a department, Canadian Heritage, and amend all related laws accordingly. After thoroughly examining this bill, we unfortunately must come to the conclusion that such is not the case.

This bill is more than a purely technical measure. It would create a department where the minister would have the following powers, duties and functions, under clause 5:

—initiate, recommend, coordinate, implement (and promote) national policies, projects and programs with respect to Canadian identity and values, cultural development, heritage—

Madam Speaker, through you, I draw the attention of members of this House to the fact that the adjective "Canadian" refers to the following four items in the list I just read, so it should be taken to read as follows: "In exercising the powers and performing the duties and functions (assigned to the minis-

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ter by section 4), the minister shall initiate, recommend, coordinate, implement (and promote) national policies, projects and programs with respect to Canadian identity, Canadian values, Canadian cultural development and Canadian heritage".

• (1225)

Accordingly, you will not be at all surprised to learn that the Bloc Québécois cannot support such a bill, for many reasons, but mainly these.

First, this bill shamelessly infringes on what so far has been considered provincial jurisdiction: culture.

Second, the steadfast obstinacy of the Canadian government in refusing to recognize the distinctiveness of Quebec society is totally unacceptable.

Third, based on our reading of this bill and on the old saying that the past is a guide to the future, it is far from obvious that the Department of Canadian Heritage provides the guarantees required to defend the French language and culture, especially those needed for the francophone and Acadian communities in Canada to continue to develop, flourish and even exist.

Mr. Milliken: It is in the Constitution.

Mrs. Tremblay: Let me speak, please, sir.

Fourth, Canadian culture is in danger, given the government's inability and lack of political will to correct its predecessor's mistakes.

As regards cultural rights, telecommunications and the electronic highway, the government maintains the existing division of jurisdictional responsibilities between the ministers of Canadian Heritage and Industry.

Put simply, this means that the Minister of Canadian Heritage will be responsible for the content, while his colleague from Industry will be in charge of the means required, such as wires, optical fibres, microwaves, etc. In other words, the former will be responsible for culture, while the latter will look after the business side of things. However, the recent experience with Ginn Publishing makes us wonder about this arrangement. The minister responsible for culture had only one thing to protect, culture, but he had no weight. Consequently, the influence of the Minister of Industry, who pledged allegiance to the U.S., prevailed. We think that maintaining the artificial dichotomy created by the previous government is to recognize the supremacy of the dollar over cultural and social values which apparently—but only apparently—do not always seem to be the most profitable ones. Consequently, the bill before us makes us fear the worse as regards the future of Canadian culture.

Let us see what is meant by the provinces' jurisdiction. The Canadian Constitution, that of 1867, gives provinces certain powers regarding culture and communications. These powers are included in subsection 92(16) of the Constitution Act, 1867,