

provision which says that minority language education rights would only be provided where numbers warrant.

He also expressed the hope that it would be possible to strengthen that section additionally by giving minorities the right to manage their own schools in addition to having the right to an education. English Quebecers have this right, notably through the Protestant School Board system.

I am astounded that the Quebec Government was presumably, therefore, willing to promote the rights of minorities. I imagine this would also have been the position of the federal Government. Given this position of the Quebec Government, how is it that the Government of Canada was able to accept an agreement which did not provide for a strengthening of French-language minority rights?

Mrs. Finestone: Madam Speaker, there was a sense within the document that it was the first time that French-language minority rights were being accepted as a right by the other provinces. The best that the Prime Minister could do was to preserve the status quo and, I presume, use the official languages and a little bit of encouragement and coercion so that it would be improved.

I see across the floor my hon. colleague who was at that time co-chairman of the official languages commission. He was with me in Saskatchewan where we spent two and one-half days talking about francophone rights outside of Quebec.

[Translation]

We have all heard cries of alarm, and cries for help for francophones who have no services at all.

[English]

In response to the question of my hon. colleague, I suggest that giving minorities the right to manage their schools is an absolutely fundamental procedure. We in Quebec remember Camille Laurin and Bill C-40 through which, less than 10 years ago, Quebec tried to unify the school system and remove English rights to it. I recall to this moment Section 23(1) which says that English-speaking children from anywhere in Canada who come to Quebec may not attend English-language schools. I believe that is a matter which could have been negotiated and which a government of good will in Quebec should adopt because it is waiting to be adopted.

It is vitally important that while we rejoice in nation-building, it cannot be predicated on linguistic duality being suppressed anywhere. No official minority can accept the price of the reduction of its rights at any time. If Mr. Gil Remillard is prepared to promote that I am equal as an English-speaking Canadian in Quebec and that I contribute to the fabric of that society along with the Greeks, Italians, Vietnamese, Hondurans and El Salvadorans who live in my riding, I am all the more comforted. However, let them say it and let them put the Charter into the Constitution.

Constitution Amendment, 1987

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The Hon. Member for Charlevoix (Mr. Hamelin), for questions or comments.

Mr. Hamelin: I have a question and, of course, a comment.

The Hon. Member has stressed, and I think she is one of the Members of this House who has taken a very broad view of Canada's linguistic duality and the need to promote—not just protect but promote—that duality. In the Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons, we put the same question to various witnesses, and some of them felt that this Accord was the most we could obtain at the present time, considering the state of mind of the provinces.

We must not forget, in fact, that is the question I wanted to ask the Hon. Member: Isn't it true that considering the present situation in Canada, it would have been almost impossible to require our provincial partners to be realistic and promote Canada's linguistic duality on equal terms?

Mrs. Finestone: Madam Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member from the bottom of my heart for asking this question. In my view, the rights of Canadians are the same for each and everyone of us across Canada. It makes no difference where we happen to be, and that is what I was driving at. You were on the committee. Look at page 52, item 91, and read it carefully. It says:

"The Joint Committee accepts the advice that the "linguistic duality" clause is a constitutional step in the right direction for French-speaking minorities outside Quebec and that in law the "distinct society" clause is unlikely to erode in any significant way the existing entrenched constitutional rights of the English-speaking minority within Quebec."

I don't want to be eroded at all.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Resuming debate. The Hon. Member for Kamloops-Shuswap (Mr. Riis).

● (1540)

[English]

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, it is a real delight to have an opportunity to participate in this historic debate. I remember vividly the debate of 1981-82 when we patriated the Canadian Constitution, which included the entrenchment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Seven years ago we participated in a very positive way with the political Parties of the House of Commons co-operating to a large extent. We rose above, in a sense, partisan political differences to address the needs before us at the time. Of course, that was with respect to the patriation of the Constitution.

I recall from the joint committee hearings into the Meech Lake Accord, and certainly from studying the transcripts of the hearings, that what became very evident, in pointing out the very positive nature of the committee work was, again, the non-partisan nature of the discussions and of the work. The committee members, on balance, set aside petty, and perhaps