

Adjournment Debate

Maritimes, we will see more jobs created. The federal Government is discussing with the provincial Governments and the private sector ways to promote the Western Economic Diversification.

I commend the Hon. Member for raising this point in the House so that we can correct the record. The distortions given in the statistics left with us by the Leader of the New Democratic Party really do no service to the country at all.

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES—RIGHT TO USE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF ONE'S CHOICE. RIGHT TO USE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE EVERYWHERE IN CANADA—OPPORTUNITY TO PUT PRESSURE ON ALBERTANS

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Madam Speaker, I hope I will have as much time as the previous speaker!

Mr. Prud'homme: He hopes to have as much time as the previous speaker!

Mr. Gauthier: Last June 30 I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) a question concerning the right to use the official language of one's choice everywhere in Canada, and especially before the provincial legislatures and before the courts. I will recall the facts for those who might have forgotten them.

On April 7, 1987, Alberta Member of the Legislative Assembly Léo Piquette was denied the right to speak or the right to express himself in French before the Legislative Assembly. Some time later, on June 26, the Committee on Privileges of the Alberta Assembly made a decision and requested Mr. Piquette to apologize for having questioned the authority of the Speaker of the House and spoken French before the Alberta Legislature. In addition the committee recommended that any Member wishing to address the House in a language other than English first obtain the agreement of the Speaker of the House.

Madam Speaker, I raised objections at the time and I am still raising objections because I sincerely believe that any Canadian, whoever he may be, with a Charter of Rights, with an official declaration stating that French and English are the official languages of the country . . . Madam Speaker, I believe that this constitutional right enables us to use French or English, to express ourselves freely and without restraints before the courts and before a provincial legislature.

● (1815)

I realize that this right is not recognized in practice everywhere, that there are restrictions, but we all work toward eliminating this resistance, and this is why, as everyone knows, Madam Speaker, I often refer in this House to basic inalienable rights which should be guaranteed to all Canadians by our Constitution, because we of the minority, who must work hard to survive in this country, whether in this province or elsewhere, need to have our rights protected and promoted. I know that the Parliamentary Secretary will tell me that, under

the constitutional amendments proposed to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Meech Lake Accord, the provinces would have to protect the official language minorities, that is the French-speaking minorities outside Quebec and the English-speaking minority in Quebec. However, I believe that it is still more important to realize that it is essential for the survival of this country to promote French-speaking minorities because we are submerged in an English-speaking sea in North America and we are being conditioned every day by American television, books, films, music, and so on. I am not the only one to say so. During the weekend, I read a newspaper article in which certain English-speaking groups were saying that it was time for the Canadian anglophones to become aware of this Americanization and that they had to be able to assert and defend their Canadian identity.

This phenomenon has also been noticed elsewhere, Madam Speaker. European countries are complaining about it. Countries such as France, Britain, Germany and Japan are facing a major cultural upheaval. As we know, China has also opened its doors to the United States and it will now be subject to American influences too. If these countries are influenced by the English-speaking North American culture when they are so geographically distant from the United States, how much more so are we influenced by it, we French-speaking Canadians outside Quebec, in Ontario or elsewhere? We need the political will to guarantee our survival, but first of all, we need constitutional guarantees to ensure that the survival of the minorities and their rights will not depend only on this political will.

Indeed, the Prime Minister recognized this fact in his answer to my question on June 30, and I quote:

We are going to work together with the Fédération des francophones hors Québec and the provincial Governments, and with language minorities wherever they happen to be, to promote—

—and I emphasize this word—

—to promote their rights at all times.

That, Madam Speaker, is a political will and indeed this commitment by the Government is incorporated in Section 40 of the Official Languages Act and I quote:

Commitment to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada.

Madam Speaker, that is a legal obligation that is set out in the Official Languages Act. It is not a constitutional obligation. It is not the same thing because an Act can always be amended while a Constitution is more difficult to amend, it is a much more reliable safeguard and that is what we are aiming at, we of the French-Canadian diaspora. Francophones would like to see their rights spelled out in the Constitution just as Anglophones from Quebec are entitled to expect that their rights be also guaranteed by the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, I am happy that the Federal level has given a commitment to promote the vitality of linguistic minority communities in the Official Languages Act that was introduced, as we will recall, on June 25, 1987. However, I