

*Supply*

in second language training, which they considered as expanding their personal and cultural horizons.

This wind of change blowing across the country made it possible to take the promotion of official languages a step further. So, in 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrined the official status of the French and English languages in the Constitution. Section 23 recognized the right to receive primary and secondary school instruction in the language of the minority where—as pointed out earlier—numbers warranted. To this day, this represents one of the most valuable gains made by linguistic communities which perceive education as the best way to ensure their development.

The purpose of that section was to redress historical injustices French-speaking minorities had suffered in certain provinces.

[*English*]

Following the promulgation of the charter however many questions were raised. What was meant by “where the numbers warrant?” Did it mean that official language communities had the right to manage their own schools? What was the actual scope of section 23? French speaking parents turned to the courts to find the answers to their questions. From then on the management of schools became their rallying cry.

• (1250)

In the wake of the charter the federal government decided to update the Official Languages Act in 1988. It conferred on the secretary of state the mandate to foster the development and vitality of minority official languages communities and to promote the use of French and English in Canadian society. This mandate is now my responsibility as Minister of Canadian Heritage.

During the same period the decision by the Supreme Court confirmed the right of francophones to manage their own schools. Yet despite the clear decision of the Supreme Court the constant pressure of French speaking communities and the repeated offers of support by the federal government, several provinces were slow to take action to respect their constitutional obligations.

[*Translation*]

In order to foster dialogue and encourage provinces, which assume responsibility for education, to do something regarding the teaching of the French language, the federal government adopted concrete measures to support the implementation of school management and post-secondary education in French.

This initiative resulted, among other things, in the implementation of several management projects across the country, as well as in the setting up of the community college network, something which was long-awaited by Ontario francophones.

Moreover, in spite of the fact that we are going through a difficult economic period, the Canadian government has decided to spare school management from the recent budget cuts so that, at last, school boards can get down to business.

We hope that the management of French-language schools by francophones will soon become a reality and we are working hard to that end.

We made significant progress regarding the promotion, spreading and teaching official languages, and this includes the legal recognition of their status.

This is not the time to back off, because there is still a lot to do. Minorities are always vulnerable, but minorities speaking one of the official languages within each province make an essential contribution to our identity and our national unity, and they deserve the government's support.

The Department of Canadian Heritage subsidizes 350 groups which work to promote official language communities in our country. These groups provide direct support to the communities and form dynamic organizations within our society.

In co-operation with the federal government, these groups are active in almost every field, including literacy, the economy and, of course, education.

Under co-operation agreements signed with each province and each territory, the federal government also helps these jurisdictions to provide education in the language of their minority.

This co-operation translates, for example, into the construction of new educational institutions for francophones, such as the Cité collégiale, in Ottawa, and the École de droit at l'Université de Moncton, as well as the development of new teaching programs in French and the setting up of independent school boards.

It must be pointed out that, without the federal government's support in the field of education, provinces would have to absorb all the costs related to such initiatives.

Moreover, federal funding helps over 2.7 million students learn French or English as a second language, including 300,000 students enrolled in French immersion.

Surveys even show that three out of four Canadians want their children to learn French or English as a second language.

[*English*]

Why do so many Canadian parents and children want to learn the second language while here we are discussing the relevance of promoting official languages in the country? They do so because they see a definite advantage to be gained. During a period of economic change countries simply cannot isolate themselves and linguistic duality is an undeniable strength.