

The Address

[English]

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add a few comments to this debate being someone who comes from southern Ontario, very much an anglophone region.

Ultimately, my question is: Is it a matter of language or is it a matter of other things that we might have in common? I would like to very briefly tell an anecdote for the benefit of the hon. members of the Bloc.

Some 15 years ago I was a journalist at a newspaper in southern Ontario when an event occurred in Quebec that some of the Bloc Quebecois members will remember. It was called the Saint-Jean-Vianney landslide that occurred in the region of Lac-Saint-Jean.

I, as the only reporter at my newspaper with only my school French, and very poor French I have to say, was sent to that area on the anniversary of the landslide to do a story on a year's aftermath. I had a great deal of difficulty, with my poor school French, to communicate with the people in the area because the accent was very different than the accent I had been taught in school.

However, I have to say that the people were very nice. They took me to their local club, an Odd Fellows hall, in which I must say I felt very much at home. I was able to communicate with the people through a person I had met in the club from northern Ontario. He was able to translate my bad French into the Québécois French—and possibly my very bad English as well—which was very useful for me.

What was so striking about this event was that even with the language problem I felt very much at home when I sat in this little Odd Fellows hall. We then went across to the beverage room, as we would say in English Canada in those days. I suppose Le bar is what they say in the Lac-Saint-Jean region.

As a journalist in those days, I very much favoured drinking Scotch. Journalists in those days drank scotch in order to show that they really were newspapermen. At the bar I asked if I could have a scotch. I was told that they did not have scotch, only rye, but I still felt very much at home. We really share a Canadian thing in that.

What I finally found out during my investigation of the landslide was that when the catastrophe occurred the majority of the people in Saint-Jean-Vianney were watching hockey. I felt very much at home.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec—Est): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me, as I start my maiden speech here in the House of Commons, to speak on the subject of agriculture. Since I have the privilege of being the official agriculture and agri-food critic, and I am delighted because I know that agriculture is

a very important sector. As the hon. member for Simcoe North said earlier, and I must say I agree, agriculture is the backbone of a number of regions in this country. Agriculture is a wonderful industry and an important one. Unfortunately, Canadians do not realize how important agriculture is.

● (1830)

There are approximately 200,000 producers in Canada with a gross income of about \$23 billion, which is quite substantial. There are almost 2 million jobs, both directly and indirectly, in the agricultural sector in Canada. If I had more time, I could say a lot about the job creation potential of this sector. I will not have a chance to do so this evening, but there is considerable potential for job creation in the agricultural industry.

Agriculture is so important in Canada that if we include farm production and the entire agri-food chain in this country, agriculture is our most important industry. It is more important than the automobile industry, being worth another \$8 billion. When I say the whole agri-food chain, I am referring to everyone involved, the distributors and manufacturers and everything in the agri-food sector in this country. This represents \$838 billion per year as part of our GDP. In Quebec, agriculture is worth \$4 billion more than the pulp and paper industry.

Agriculture is therefore a very important and a very significant industry. That is probably why we have a full House this evening, to listen to my speech on agriculture. It is also one of Canada's leading edge industries. We must not forget that. Going back in history, one could say that agriculture is probably one of the industries that form the basis of Confederation. It also contributed to Canada's image as the bread basket of the world. However, today, in 1994, it has also become a very modern and very progressive industry. In some sectors, such as Western grain and red meat, we rank number one in the world. Dairy production especially is very important. We have a highly developed industry in which advances in technology have been considerable. On the international scene, exports of genetic material are worth about \$85 million, and this may include Holstein cows, for instance, for reproduction purposes.

Without getting into too much detail, I want to say that agriculture is a very important industry in terms of the economy and also in terms of the advanced technology that is being used. We rank among the first in the world.

The problem is that unfortunately, people underestimate agriculture. It is not fashionable. Agriculture may be misunderstood. To many people, agriculture is folklore. Farmers are still seen as potato producers. People do not realize how complicated a farmer's life is today. It takes a lot of technology and a lot of knowledge. He has to know about machinery; he has to know about herbicides and pesticides and fertilizer; he has to know his animals, construction and whole lot of other things. He has to be an expert and a jack-of-all-trades.