

The Address

To remind those who might have forgotten, in 1982, a referendum had been held in Winnipeg on the rights to services for francophone minority in that city and was defeated.

Since the Conservative government has taken power, progress has been slower. In his first Speech from the Throne in 1984, he said, and I quote: "My government is committed to ensuring that the equality of the two official languages—so vital to our national character and identity—is respected in fact as it is in law."

That promise was not kept, Mr. Speaker. That equality is not a reality today. In the 1986 Speech from the Throne, the Conservative government promised to amend the Official Languages Act. It was amended two years later in 1988. But here we are, in 1991, three years later, and the regulations have still not been passed. The act is a paper tiger, Mr. Speaker, since the regulations have not been passed. Three years after this House passed a bill on official languages, we are still waiting for the regulations.

Even worse. Rumour has it that this Conservative government is considering transferring to provinces the implementation of the official languages policy.

Mr. Prud'homme: That will be quite something.

Mr. Gauthier: The implementation of linguistic rights.

• (1550)

The Speech from the Throne delivered yesterday does not contain a single word to put that rumour to rest or to reassure French-speaking Canadians outside Quebec who sometimes feel they have to go underground for fear of hostile reactions from their neighbourhood.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, polls indicate a noticeable change in our youth. One can still hope that some day, the Canadian identity, which is largely based on our linguistic duality, will be more than a constitutional reality and become part of the heart and spirit of Canadian men and women.

Debates have been going on throughout this country. A total of eight committees sat and some are still sitting. I will name them, Mr. Speaker. There is the Spicer Commission, the Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future, the Beaudoin-Edwards Joint Special Committee on the Process for Amending the Constitution of Canada, the Silipo Commission in Ontario, the Bélanger-Campeau Commission in Quebec, the Horsman Committee in Alberta, the British Columbia Cabinet Committee on Confederation, the Manitoba Task Force on the Consti-

tution, the New Brunswick Commission on Canadian Federalism. In all, there are eight commissions presently studying this question.

Mr. Speaker, our country deserves of course much consideration, but also some actions. I believe then, as I tried to make it clear earlier, that dualism is one of the foundations of our federation. If you do away with this feature, Mr. Speaker, you will kill my country. I am quite sure of that.

Second concept: regionalism. It is a basic concept established a long time ago in Canada, since, as I said earlier, our country is so big. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, what other country can boast having vast and fertile prairies, huge farming land, large mountainous regions dotted with lakes, wild regions in the North and the Arctic tundra?

Our country has evolved from distinct regional communities strongly attached to their local identity and traditions. Still, regionalism is one of the foundations of Confederation, but it is also considered to be one of the scapegoats for nationalistic conflicts. I hear members of the "Bar-B-Q" party over there who plague us with their short comments once in a while. Quebec asks for a distinct status or, as it is put in the Throne Speech, unique.

During the school tour I made in my riding since January—I visited almost every single one of them—I was asked the following question: What makes Quebec so different or unique, since it was said today that these two words meant it was the same thing? I did not say that the Minister responsible did it. Aren't all our provinces distinct? Of course, all our provinces are distinct, Mr. Speaker! That is what makes our country so rich.

But with 5.5 million of people speaking French on a territory where 280 to 300 hundred million of people speak English, Quebec is the only community in North America with a French speaking majority. Besides its language, Quebec has its own Civil Code, its own economic institutions—caisses populaires, Quebec Deposit and Investment Fund, etc. Quebec negotiates educational and cultural agreements directly with France; it participates in numerous international conferences and contributes to the work of the international organizations. Moreover, Quebec has its own pension plan and administers its immigration program. So, by virtue of its language, its culture, its legislation and its economical structures, Quebec is distinct from the other provinces, it is unique.