

deeply rooted. A Jeannois or a Bleuet speaks loudly and does not go unnoticed. Such a will to overcome the humiliations suffered as a result of our remoteness has led us to answer those who reply yes, but your place is far away. Far away from what? It is right to say that we of the Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean area are somewhat our own masters.

In that respect, Mr. Speaker, I would point out the unique testimony in our history of the setting up of Entraide Économique, one of the more progressive financial institutions in Quebec. Started from a simple but good intention less than 20 years ago, that savings co-operative now handling billions of dollars has undoubtedly contributed more in at least the past ten years to the development of small and medium-sized businesses in our area and in Quebec as a whole than all levels of government put together. You know, Mr. Speaker, there is no miracle there.

● (1740)

But there was a certain Jacques Gagnon, a worker from our own region, who 20 years ago, having enlisted the help of other workers, was determined to do something and to enable the people of his own region to help themselves. These people I say have now regrouped around the new president, Mr. Eric Forest. They are still working very hard, not only at the regional level, but also at the provincial level, and I believe that they have now proven themselves completely.

I have quoted this particular example to illustrate what I consider the profound meaning of the present constitutional debate. The main issue concerns on the one hand the distribution of present powers, and on the other the coherent use of the powers already existing. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, in the eventuality of redistribution of jurisdictional areas, we have to take into account the irreversible upward thrust of the regions and I would even suggest, as Senator Maurice Lamontagne said, that no commitment to any constitutional change can be undertaken before we evaluate the impact of these regional characteristics on which our opportunities for economic, social and cultural development will increasingly depend. My experience within regional organizations and as head of a municipal government has convinced me and many others that the real debate does not concern a fight between central powers, but rather the means that those who hold these powers are willing to take to provide the members of regional communities with the control required to better develop the ways of meeting their regional needs.

[English]

The upcoming reality tends towards the virtual admission of "small is beautiful". Indeed, no constitutional changes should be initiated without respecting regional assets. And, when I think of regional powers, I refer to the latitude to which local communities could afford to go in the administrative process, in political and financial issues concerning the quality of life of all citizens of a region, normally defined by human and natural factors.

The Address—Mr. Deans

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, in view of the trends which I have listed, I would support any proposal to renew our political equilibrium which would take into account the true aspirations of the citizens. The political history of Quebec in this regard and the disequilibrium it is now causing in the Canadian structure do not in my view provide the whole context of the problem. The separation of Quebec would not solve anything, but could well delay the granting of the regional powers which are so important for our communities, and my region is certainly not the least concerned in this matter. The political separation of Quebec from the Canadian nation would bring about an undeniable flow of centralization towards Quebec City at the expense of the regions, and the process has already begun with Act 57 on municipal reform, Mr. Speaker. This eventuality can be verified by the consequences of jurisdictional reorganizations which a sovereign Quebec would have to face.

The mood and the temper in the Canadian government as well as in that of Quebec, temper which has been obvious for several years already, would threaten to abort and minimize, if not contradict, reality. The same phenomenon in other parts of Canada, if they too decided to copy the behaviour of present day Quebec leaders, would provoke a comparable imbalance. Still, Mr. Speaker, those other areas express their regional needs energetically without rejecting the federal formula for political organization. Of course, some will say that Quebec is a different province. I recognize that. But how is it different? In that we are Francophones, but if we have survived to this day, it may be that some protection spared us from becoming the fourth underdeveloped state of northern United States.

Mr. Speaker, as a Quebecker, proud to be a Quebecker and proud to be a Canadian, I want to repeat to this House what I said throughout my election campaign: I consider myself every bit as much of a Quebecker as any woman who is a member of the PQ in the province of Quebec. I am Quebecker and, as I have already said, I am proud to be a Quebecker, and I want to remain a Quebecker in a united Canada.

[English]

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure to be here. I have looked forward to this day for some time, as you can appreciate, having watched the workings of the federal Parliament for a long number of years.

I first want to congratulate Madam Speaker on the assumption of her new role, and to say that if the last two or three days are any indication of the way in which she will handle the business of the House, she is to be commended for the way she has picked up and assumed that role.

I also want to congratulate all members who are either returned or have been elected for the first time. I know as a first-time member how exciting it is to get elected to Parliament, and how important the role is that we all have to play. I want to say to the constituents who trooped out to the polls on election day and voted in vast numbers to send me here that I hope I will provide them with the kind of satisfaction and