

Official Languages

in perpetuity, this agreement placed the land at the disposal of the federal government for a period of 99 years and gave the province of Quebec the right to regain possession at the end of 60 years on repayment of expenditures incurred by the federal government. If the Prime Minister says this is not special status, then I would like him to explain it to the other nine provinces which have entered into agreements to turn over land in perpetuity.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I say very seriously it is my firm conviction that this legislation contravenes our constitution. I therefore oppose it on those most reasonable and, I believe, solid grounds, and will be obliged to do so until the legislation is tested in the courts of our country.

[Translation]

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to have the opportunity now to comment on this bill which is extremely important. I am very glad to take part in this debate on the official languages bill which concerns all the hon. members and all the Canadian people.

As a representative of the province of Quebec, I will have the pleasure to put forward some arguments which have to be advanced in this house. In my opinion, it is not only a matter of principle which we are discussing at this time, but also the recognition of the French language on a national basis, the recognition of the English language having been secured already now for a number of years.

I would be remiss in my duty if I did not mention that before coming to this house, I worked within various nationalistic or political groups.

I have always been very happy to discuss the French-Canadian nation and to promote its development, not only in Quebec but all across Canada.

All the hon. members will understand that we have been and still are somewhat concerned about the recognition of the French language which, in short, is the recognition as we said earlier of the two founding groups, the French-speaking and the English-speaking groups.

Since I encountered some difficulties in my work to promote that language and the Canadian nation, I made an attempt to get elected to this house so that I might represent here the French element. I thought it was the best way, without for all that thrusting myself on anybody, that it was here in this

house that we should discuss very calmly the problems that exist in this country as a whole.

I am given today the opportunity to deal with this bill and to say very objectively that if we were granted bilingual cheques and simultaneous translation after 90 years, I would not like people to believe they were mere gifts nor think that French Canadians would be satisfied with bilingual cheques or simultaneous translation.

This debate has something to do with justice and those who represent the majority merely want to put justice into practice or appeal to it. That justice, we obviously have been hoping for it for a long time for it does not exist for the province of Quebec only but for all minorities.

• (9:10 p.m.)

We should, I believe, deal in an objective way with French-Canadian minorities in other provinces that have been waiting a long time for such recognition. I believe that as a member of parliament, even if it were only to stand up for minorities, I must take part in this debate in a constructive and objective way. Certain members find it somewhat difficult to recognize that principle, but I do not believe any one can refuse to recognize it for it merely means the recognition of the two founding groups.

I am in a good position to deal with difficulties and to tell you that in Quebec we know what difficulties are. Thanks to some progress made in the last ten years, we have more faith than ever in this common life, in the greatness of our country and in this involvement in federal politics.

It is difficult to have some members accept this bill which would seem to displease some minorities. But I think we must all admit this principle of the recognition of those two founding groups. I think we are right to ask for it because, in my opinion, that is in harmony with the history of our country and also because that is how we have managed so far to build a country which is nonetheless an object of envy for some in the world.

As for the various ethnic groups which make up Canada, it is understood that we do not wish to oppress the minorities which compose them. Far from it. We must first recognize the French fact and the English fact.

Our political leaders have perhaps lacked courage when it was a question of making the various ethnic groups accept and understand, when they came to settle in Canada, that they