

AGH
IMFFranco-phony ^(A.24)

PARTICIPANTS at the Francophonie summit which ended Sunday may not have accomplished much, but they whipped up a debate on human rights whose irony had more layers than a *mille-feuille* pastry. To mention but one tidbit, Ottawa representatives joined Paris in resisting Quebec's suggestion that the Francophonie grant itself the power to place sanctions on human-rights abusers only to have the Quebec initiative described in France's high-brow *Le Monde* newspaper as a proposal of "les Canadiens."

The effort to concoct a human-rights purpose for the organization of countries united — by France — in their former colonial exploitation — by France — would perhaps have been manageable if not for all the other ironic icing offered by the Francophonie. Add the fact that this organization of countries "with French in common" keeps expanding while French usage contracts worldwide, and that it has decided to add Moldova to its membership list and has Poland waiting in the wings. Note, also, that since only 1 per cent of people in Vietnam speak French, the main connection between Francophonie and the summit's host country is the jumping trade in frog's legs. Sprinkle on the peculiarities of France leading the Francophonie overseas but dismantling its ministry of Francophonie at home. Garnish with thrice-a-decade political high jinks of Quebec and Canadian politicians sharing the Francophonie stage as diplomatic peers. *Voilà*, it's easy to see that the Francophonie is a recipe for confusion.

Unlike the Commonwealth, whose countries share both a British colonial past and, for the most part, British political and judicial institutions, the Francophonie ties are tenuous indeed. Therefore, in the name of strengthening

sound basics, perhaps it would be best if the organization stuck to the simple purposes which the majority of its members like best: preserving French-speaking culture and transferring developmental assistance from rich former French colonies to poor ones.

This sort of assistance and education will go farther toward improving the lot of average citizens in the member countries than human-rights sanctions could. Canada, with its well-practiced abilities in foreign aid and in the transfer of basic technical and governance skills, has long championed the cause of development. Twenty-eight members of the 50-member Francophonie are poor African states, and Canadian aid workers have been active in many of them. While it's true that Canada has been scaling back developmental assistance because of fiscal restraint, it can and should remain front and centre. And if Quebec and Canada's third Francophonie member, New Brunswick, see ways of using the organizational links to further their own aims in Third World economic development, so much the better.

Of course, the soundest lessons of development are a legacy of Canada's other, more successful colonial master, Britain. These lessons include teaching the benefits of capitalism, open, deliberative bodies of governance, a free press, and the rule of law. Canada and the two francophone provinces are in the peculiar position of being able to use the enticing medium of French culture to recommend essentially British innovations. All through an organization whose drive to promote French is in part motivated by a sense that the Anglo-American paradigm dominates the world.

That final irony seems highly appropriate for the somewhat bewildered Francophonie. And it's so very, *très* Canadian.