

Government Orders

Mrs. Finestone: I feel right at home, and I refuse to leave.

Mrs. Tremblay: I listened to you, Madam, so try to listen to me while I speak. Thank you.

In summary, what the deputy minister, cultural development tells us is that the Canadian identity includes the Quebec identity. He said in committee that their general vision is that the Quebec identity is a fundamental component of the Canadian identity.

This vision, which would wipe out Quebecois culture as if it did not exist by itself but was only an integral part of Canadian culture, was denounced by many groups that appeared before the Committee on Canadian Heritage during the marathon hearings which, by using dilatory procedural tactics, we were able to force the government to hold.

François Rocher, a political scientist at Carleton University, said that what the government was doing was part of an incomplete process of nation-building, based on a denial of the national realities that already exist in Canada. Establishing a heritage department is part of a much broader plan to refashion the way that Canada's identity is to be understood and expressed. Mr. Rocher thus shares the idea expressed by his colleague, Mr. Monière, who said that the heritage department was really a propaganda department.

In fact, what the government is doing is, first, to deny the social and historic reality of an existing Quebec culture and nation; second, to imagine a fictitious Canadian national community to hide the lack of a common sense of Canadian identity; third, the government wishes to promote this made-up identity and even impose it on all communities in Canada.

It is quite obvious that this is intended particularly to counter Quebec nationalism. To oppose the growing demands for particular identities, the government proposes a homogenizing national vision. However, building a national identity on the denial of already existing identities that are strong and politically articulate can only exacerbate the tensions that exist in Canada.

It must be pointed out that all the efforts of this department consisted and from now on will consist in denying the existence of a culture other than the Canadian one and furthermore in using our taxes to promote this Canadian culture on Quebec territory. Why do the Bloc Quebecois and most of the witnesses who appeared before the heritage committee so strongly denounce this denial of Quebec culture by the federal government? Quite simply, because failing to mention it in the bill means denying its existence.

Mr. Rocher said that three conditions are essential for a culture to exist. First, it must be able to express itself; that is, it must be rich and flourishing. Second, it must be able to fulfil itself, that is, be used and valued in economic, social and

political activities. Finally, it must be recognized, that is, accepted and taken into consideration by other communities close by.

• (1210)

The right to exist is part of one's identity. The identity must represent something, not only for the individuals which make up a community, but also for the other communities which recognize the legitimacy of that identity.

Let us now come to the second reason why the Bloc Quebecois will oppose this bill, namely the failure of the federal government's official languages policy.

This legislation provides no major change regarding federal policies on bilingualism, as was confirmed to us, in committee, by the responsible deputy minister at the Department of Canadian Heritage. According to paragraph 4(2)(g) of the bill, the minister is responsible for, and I quote:

(g) the advancement of the equality of status and use of English and French and the enhancement and development of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada;

Also, clauses 23 and 24 of the bill amend the Official Languages Act to confirm that the Minister of Canadian Heritage will be the one responsible for the implementation of sections 41 and 42, Part VII, of the Official Languages Act, which relate to the co-ordination and the implementation of linguistic policies within federal departments.

So, there is nothing new under the sun. Yet, the government should really have brought major changes to its linguistic policy. It should have clearly indicated its intention to salvage what can still be salvaged.

Let us take a look at some figures, 25 years after the Official Languages Act took effect. First, the percentage of Canadians whose first language is French is dropping drastically, and the official languages policy implemented in 1969 has done nothing to stop that trend.

According to Statistics Canada's latest census, 6.5 million Canadians, or 23.8 per cent of the population, have French as their mother tongue. In 1951, that proportion was 29 per cent.

Let us look at the assimilation rate, which is the ratio between the number of those who say French is their mother tongue and the number of those who actually use French at home. According to the latest census, the average assimilation rate in Canada, excluding Quebec, was 35.9 per cent, which represents an increase of 4.5 per cent over the 1986 figure.

British Columbia is the undisputed champion with an assimilation rate of 75.2 per cent. Saskatchewan is in second place with a rate of 69.6 per cent, followed by Alberta with 66.9 per cent. Even New Brunswick, which is the only constitutionally bilingual province and which prides itself in giving special treatment to French, has an assimilation rate of 8.7 per cent.