

\$10 billion; in 12 years, the total assets of the *Caisses d'entraide économique* (Economic credit unions) went from one million to more than a billion dollars. Moreover, by creating a universal pension plan we have been able to increase our collective savings considerably: the *Caisse de dépôt et de placement* (deposit and investment fund) now ranks among the largest investment companies in Canada in terms of size and the variety of its holdings. As for Hydro-Quebec, its assets make it the biggest firm of any kind in Canada and one of the largest producers and distributors of electricity in North America.

"We are already a rich country. In 1978, our *per capita* Gross Domestic Product ranked Quebec fourteenth among 150 countries in the world.\*"

#### Development not hindered

We Quebecers are therefore not the damned of the earth, even in the eyes of the harshest critics of the present system. Those critics may have denounced the "crimes" committed under federalism, pointed out certain very real cases of injustice of which we were the victims, but they have to admit that we are not emerging from a century of confederal cohabitation with our Anglophone compatriots as an impoverished people — quite the contrary. The White Paper does stress that the situation we find ourselves in is not the result of "some political system". It follows none the less from this description that Canadian federalism, in spite of its faults, has not prevented Quebecers from developing their culture and their economy. That is probably what is making half of them (perhaps more — we will know on May 21) hesitate over the venture being proposed to them.

They know from personal experience that the Canadian federal system is one of the most decentralized in the world and that Quebec enjoys a great deal of autonomy. The government of the province has exclusive powers in some very important areas: it is master in its own house in the area of education, is sole administrator of justice in its own territory, exploits its vast natural resources as it sees fit, has its own police force, is free to raise any kind of loan where it wishes and how it wishes in Canada or abroad without even notifying the Federal Government, legislates in the area of language,

and has a great deal of authority, often the lion's share, in social security and urban development. With the exception of national defence and foreign affairs, there are hardly any areas from which it is excluded. As far as foreign affairs are concerned, it does have general delegations in several countries — France, for example — and is a member of the principal organization of La Francophonie internationale, the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation, as a participating government.

It is therefore not, as people in other countries often tend to believe, an ostracized, powerless Francophone community, paralysed in its development by an oppressive system and unitary institutions which deny it all right to be different, to use an expression in vogue with those who advocate sovereignty. Certain minorities in the Anglophone provinces are probably right in reproaching their provincial governments for not complying with their cultural aspirations. However, it is by virtue of the same exclusive powers which Quebec enjoys that some governments refuse their French-speaking communities certain rights.

#### Crisis situation

It is obvious that there are serious reasons for discontent, since we are now facing a crisis situation. It would be easier to find the solutions to their problems under renewed federalism than it would be if the proposed secession were to occur.

They reject, for example, the discontinuance of the Federal Government, in which Quebec is very well represented. It is a well-known fact that Canada's Francophone community scored some important points during the past decade as it became aware of its political power. The federal authorities were the first, ahead even of Quebec itself, to pass language legislation to protect and spread the French language throughout Canada. I know that certain commentators in Canada and even in France are quick to say that the official languages policy initiated by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1969 has ended in failure. Many examples can probably be cited in support of that conclusion. The Canadian Government itself, far from hiding the problems, reports on any failures. It was aware from the beginning that its language policy would meet with a great deal of resistance because it constituted a real revolution for English-speaking Canadians and its

application would take years to ensure. It appointed an Official Languages Commissioner, a permanent, strict and uncompromising guardian to report to Parliament on violations to the spirit and the letter of the legislation. Just last week, in the middle of the referendum campaign, the Commissioner publicly and harshly criticized in his annual report the obstinate way in which the application of the Act has been and still is being delayed, neglected and resisted, ten years after the legislation was passed.

Can one really say that the policy has failed? Before answering that question, one has to carefully define what the policy was designed to accomplish. An apparently undying myth, and I say undying because it is still being propagated by responsible journalists, has it that Mr. Trudeau dreamed of transforming 23 million Canadians into perfectly bilingual citizens. If that were really the case, his policy could only have ended in absolute failure. However, there was never any question of undertaking such a project. The objective of the Act and the policy is ambitious, admittedly, but it is also realistic. The goal is to ensure that every Canadian citizen is able to communicate with the central government and receive services from that government in the official language of his choice; to make possible the free use of French and English in the public service and all government agencies. In point of fact, the goal is to gain acceptance for the French language and give it equal status in the enormous state machine which had largely ostracized it for more than a century. It goes without saying that, after ten years, this goal has not yet been realized.

#### Progress made

However, must we speak of failure and preach surrender when enormous progress has been made? The extension of French radio and television from the Atlantic to the Pacific does not constitute a failure. The simultaneous publishing in French and English of all legislation and of thousands of publications, reports and studies of various kinds is now a reality. The possibility for tens of thousands of Francophone public servants to work in their own language, where they once had to adopt English as their language of work is not an illusion. Nor is the promotion of thousands of Francophones to positions to which, until now, they had

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\*Source: OECD, Main economic indicators, April 1979. These comparisons are based on the National GDP/*per capita* in American dollars.