

Mr. McGrath: I do not mean any disrespect to the hon. Jean-Luc Pepin, Mr. Robarts, or anybody else on that committee—I have nothing but respect for them—but I say, let the government have its task force and let us have a joint parliamentary committee so that we can get on with our responsibility to our constituents in this great debate.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1840)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Duclos (Montmorency): Mr. Speaker, I have decided to enter this debate first of all to assert my hope and my confidence that my country, Canada, will maintain its territorial integrity, but also to tell the House how in the view of a young Quebecer who became aware of government affairs at the time of the “quiet revolution” in Quebec, this Canadian crisis could be defused.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal successively in my speech with four points which I feel sum up rather well the whole range of claims French speaking Canadians have been making for much too long already. Here they are. I will deal first with the status of the French language in Quebec, next with the status of French minorities in predominantly English-speaking provinces, next with the role of francophone civil servants and the use of the French language within the federal public service, and finally with the constitutional reform.

The debate on Bill No. 1 in the Quebec legislative assembly has over the last few months emphasized a point which I believe will be decisive for the future of Canada. It would seem however that one cannot deal intelligently with a matter if one is not familiar with some population data taken from the last decennial census conducted by Statistics Canada. Therefore, I want to submit to the House some statistics which should enable us to better understand the Quebec francophones' concerns about language matters as well as the steps the Quebec government must take to alleviate their concerns.

First of all, in the 1971 census, 270,600 Quebecers whose origin is neither British nor French reported one of the two official languages was their mother tongue. Now, 64 per cent of them said English was their mother tongue. Second, on the other hand, in the same census, 358,600 Quebecers whose origin was neither French nor English reported one of the two official languages in Canada was their working language. Of those, 69 per cent said English was their working language. Third, for each new Quebecer who joins the French-speaking group, two are joining the English-speaking group. Now, French-speaking Canadians can only maintain their present level of demographic prevalence if 80 per cent of the new Quebecers adopt the French language. Fourth, almost 100,000 Quebecers whose mother tongue is not English use English as their working language, whereas only 4,000 Quebecers whose mother tongue is not French use this language as their working language. Should the present trends of natural growth, language mobility and migration be maintained, French-speaking Canadians would represent less than 60 per cent of the whole population of greater Montreal by the turn of the century.

National Unity

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that Bill 1 introduced by the Quebec government contains some provisions which go against the linguistic ideal sought by this government for the past ten years. Other provisions such as that which makes the use of French compulsory in public notices as well as in formal proceedings of townhalls or school boards which may include an English-speaking majority, seem useless to me and unlikely to contribute to the development of the French language and culture in Quebec. Similarly, several provisions regarding the francization of businesses seem to be uselessly niggling and they may open the door to bureaucratic arbitrary decisions. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I feel nevertheless that this legislation does not deserve the criticism it gave rise to in some circles. For example, to claim that the Quebec government is trying with this legislation to get rid of the English-speaking community in Quebec is sheer demagoguery.

As far as the language of instruction is concerned, this legislation fully respects the acquired rights of Anglophones and other Quebecers who are already attending English schools. It ensures that in the future, English schools will not be an assimilation tool for New Quebecers into the English speaking minority. Indeed, no one could object to this legislation if it were to give to children of English Canadians who will settle down in Quebec after the bill is passed, access to English schools. I am very sorry that Canadian citizens are being treated like immigrants, especially as their reduced number does not threaten in any way the linguistic balance of the province of Quebec.

But frankly, Mr. Speaker, we must admit that even after the adoption of Bill 1, the English minority in Quebec will still be the best treated minority in the whole country with its own schools, colleges, universities, radio and television stations, newspapers, in short, practically a complete range of institutions. And I, as a Quebecer, will be proud of it, Mr. Speaker, because the respect and tolerance a nation shows towards its minorities is in my view the unmistakable sign of its collective maturity.

Of course, we can regret the restrictions imposed by this bill on the principle of free choice for the language of instruction but apart from the fact that it is an ideal that in any case could not materialize for quite awhile in English Canada, and even so only in a few provinces, a policy which would ensure a completely free choice of the language of education would for the time being, be a menace to the Quebec linguistic balance. We can only hope that within ten years or so when the francophone majority has reinforced its positions through active government participation in the selection of immigrants Quebec will be able to offer once again a free choice in the language of education.

Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that people who have never protested the plight of the French minorities outside Quebec are suddenly embarking on a crusade to protect the English speaking minority in Quebec and urge the federal government to disavow the Quebec legislation and even question its constitutionality before the courts. It would be paradoxical to say the least, Mr. Speaker, that the province which respects the