

The Address—Mr. Chénier

Canadian identity traces its roots to the way of life of French Canadians in Quebec, in Acadia, in northern Ontario, St. Boniface and other areas throughout Canada wherever French is spoken. A Yes vote on May 20 would endanger this country's very identity.

Mr. Lévesque complained some time ago of a declining French Canadian population in Quebec. Does he not realize that a Yes vote on Tuesday next will permanently isolate French-speaking Canadians, and annihilate the future of such Canadians outside Quebec? I have difficulty in understanding that kind of narrow mindedness that not only wishes to group Quebec citizens under a single umbrella but also makes it a point to ensure that our minority numbers in North America proceed without further ado on the road to extermination.

● (1640)

[*English*]

Our nation at this point in history is accosted by many voices of divisiveness, voices which advance points of view which, if carried into effect, would mean a very rapid end to the fragile, beautiful unity of Canada. The voices of sovereignty in Quebec are but one example of narrow-mindedness and isolationism in our Canada. In all corners of our country, embittered groups preach parochialism, advocate intolerance and ignore the great joy of brotherhood among varied people.

In Acadia and in the west we hear the same advocacy of cultural and political isolation as we hear in Quebec. In such situations it is difficult to separate the genuine need for cultural protection from the self-interest of power hungry groups exploiting the natural incidence of human differences.

Ironically, while we have a group in Quebec seeking to lead that province out of confederation because of a perceived threat to cultural and linguistic assimilation, other groups in Canada fear the drowning of the English language in a Francophone sea. The rationale for the existence of such bodies as the Alliance for the Preservation of English in Canada and the One Canada Movement frankly escapes me. What threat do these people perceive in the existence of another man's language? Are they physically or psychologically harmed in any way by the spoken word? The fact that such groups exist, although there are many groups in Canada espousing different points of view, indicates to me a profound misunderstanding of the nature of our confederation.

I know some of the members of APEC, for example, and some of these people hold very responsible positions in the community. They are not deranged or mentally limited people, but for some reason they feel threatened enough to come out of the closet and form a public organization founded on the thesis that the English language and one's right to speak English is being challenged by the presence of the French language in our federal government. They feel that the 25 per cent to 30 per cent of our population who speak French somehow deprive them of their rights as Anglophones. One can only conclude that the barricading of the French language beyond the eyes and ears of these people is what is being

asked. These people seem ready to deny their fellow-founding race the right to communicate with their government in their mother tongue simply because they do not want to hear a strange language.

I suggest that some Anglophones would benefit from a tour through Quebec. I believe the reality of a French-speaking population within the Canadian borders—the French fact—has never been accepted or even contemplated by many English Canadians. Bigotry is based on ignorance and I think that is the case with many Canadians.

I do not say this in a bitter or resentful way, but one must wonder if it is only now, now that our great nation is on the precipice of a tremendous tragedy, that English Canadians will be made aware of their brothers' rights and freedoms and, on an individual level, their feelings.

It is not too late to effect a reconciliation between our founding peoples. Canada's greatness is in the plurality of its culture and the duality of its language. This is our heritage, it is not simply a hollow cliché. English and French must reach out to each other and each man and each woman must seek out and bury his or her silly, ignorant and demeaning prejudices, the name calling, the bad jokes and the harassment. It is the little victories of tolerance, like the delicate balance in many communities in my riding sharing many cultures, that are part of the noble and worthy experiment that is Canada.

● (1650)

I appeal to my Anglophone and Francophone brothers and sisters to transcend petty prejudices and prepare themselves for the essential changes that must be made in a new constitution, changes to protect minority language rights, whether they be for the Francophone population of Chapeau or the Anglophone population of the eastern townships. If we balk at change now, we lose everything.

[*Translation*]

Before French Canadians in Quebec decide on their destinies, I would like in conclusion to make them realize one of the brutal repercussions of a Yes vote on May 20. It is not the future of one province you will be deciding upon, the future of individuals who live in it as that of your parents and friends, but also the future of those of us, a half million in Ontario alone, who live outside Quebec.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[*English*]

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. Before recognizing the hon. member for North Vancouver-Burnaby (Mr. Cook), I should deal with the late show for this evening.