

*Government Orders*

have to fight for Quebec's interests and demands? Why is the federal government ignoring Quebec's jurisdiction over culture and language?

My colleagues on this side of the House received a clear mandate to stand for the interests of Quebecers. Quebec's demands concerning cultural and linguistic jurisdiction are part of that mandate, and I will fight for them with conviction and determination.

I would like to quote what the late member for Brome—Missisquoi, Gaston Pélouin, was forever repeating to us and trying to convey to his constituents. It is a true depiction of the Canadian situation.

• (1655)

"The fundamental difference between the two solitudes is that Canada is a country looking for a people, and Quebec is a people looking for a country". The fact that my federalist friends refuse to talk about sovereignty does not mean it will not happen. Quebecers will be deciding for themselves, and the other nine provinces will have to accept that decision out of respect for justice and democracy.

The federal government keeps encroaching on exclusive Quebec jurisdictions. It can offer no guarantee about language, education and culture.

The Canadian Heritage Department is a typical example of this kind of interference in an area of jurisdiction claimed by Quebec. Essentially, the policies and priorities of the department, which were designed without consulting Quebec, are more in line with the prospect of an hypothetical country-wide cultural identity which seeks the outright assimilation, sooner or later, of the French language and the Quebec culture. I believe that is the real objective of the federal government.

[English]

The notion of cultural identity is what brings people together in a society. This notion helps to build and establish on a permanent basis the institutions that constitute a given society. What this government must understand is that the notion of cultural identity cannot be commanded or imposed in a democratic system or regime.

Thus the federal government cannot make an abstraction of the French culture and language that give distinct identity to Quebec society. The fact is that Canada is constituted by two nation states. Canada is not composed of a unique culture as the federal government would like us to believe.

These are the facts and the Minister of Canadian Heritage will have to deal with them.

[Translation]

History clearly demonstrates this. The federal government has always been trying to ignore the cultural identity of franco-

phones, and its bilingualism policy is the proof. Bilingualism in Canada is a myth, a beautiful dream, a policy that has never really worked. We must say it: the bilingualism policy has proven to be a real failure.

The fact is that francophones cannot live and get an education in French everywhere in Canada. We have the example of Franco-Ontarians. Their history is marked by struggles, by legal battles and, indeed, a resistance to assimilation. And we have the most recent example of Longlac, in northern Ontario, where the francophone community is unable to get services.

A second example are the francophone and Acadian communities in the rest of Canada. In a submission to the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages in the House of Commons in May, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes sounded the alarm, sending out a cry of distress and demanding that the federal government emerge from its indifference.

I quote the federation: "The emergency situation in which members of our communities are living is unacceptable. The assimilation rate, which is increasing from one census to another, and the social and economic situation, which is deteriorating, do not seem to worry the government overly—"

On a five-year period, the assimilation rate has increased by 4.5 per cent in the overall francophone regions outside Quebec. That is a fact. If we do not act immediately, assimilation will continue on its irreversible course, whatever people think and say here.

• (1700)

A third example: the closure of the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean. This decision is, I believe, the worst the federal government has taken in a decade.

How can the federal government justify the closure of the only French-speaking military college in the country and continue to promote its bilingualism policy? How will the federal government be able to ensure progress towards equality of status and use of the French language in the armed forces without a single French-speaking institution in this country?

According to reports the Kingston military college is not at all ready to accommodate French-speaking servicemen and to offer them the necessary training.

Those are the facts. This is the reality. The federal government denies francophones an equal status.

To continue on the same subject, I would like to give the House some statistics. Out of 13,000 so-called bilingual positions in the armed forces, only 6,000 are held by individuals sufficiently fluent in French and in English. The other 7,000 so-called bilingual positions are held by individuals who speak only English.

This again shows that the bilingualism policy has failed in Canada.