

Supply

First of all, the hon. member claimed that, according to the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Official Languages Act was not working. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I am sure all Canadians watching the House of Commons on television today know the Commissioner of Official Languages is an ombudsman. It is his role to point out any shortcomings, which there always will be, in any society. It is his role to identify them. Not in order to condemn this government or the previous government or anyone at all, but to improve the system.

Similarly, the hon. member opposite raises questions during Question Period not, I hope, to say that the people sitting on these benches are a terrible bunch, but to improve the system and make this Parliament more effective. Well, the Commissioner of Official Languages does the same thing, to improve the act and not to condemn it.

Second, I wish the hon. member opposite would explain his calculations. First of all, he chose to discount public servants working in the National Capital Region as far as minority language services are concerned. Does he not know that in addition to the national role played by public servants in the National Capital area, these people also administer regional programs? For instance, half of all francophones in Ontario, perhaps as many as 150,000, live within a radius of about 100 kilometres of this city outside Quebec. They are not served by regional offices in other locations, they are served by offices here in Ottawa. When the hon. member artificially excludes people who work in Ottawa, does he realize that he is skewing the figures?

Finally, with respect to the future of francophones outside Quebec, one does not have to be a lawyer from Baie-Comeau to realize that there is more to this than protecting the rights of francophones, important though this may be. What has kept us alive as a group in this country is critical mass. I am a Franco-Ontarian, and personally I believe that in my country, Quebec has played a major role in helping my language survive. We must be realistic and look at the facts.

The United States has no Quebec with its critical mass. Did the francophones there survive? No. The French fact is mere nostalgia in Louisiana and nothing at all in the rest of the United States, although originally there were more francophones in the United States than in Canada. Why? Because they did not have the critical mass or percentage. And that is what the Prime Minister means when he says that the francophones in Quebec are important to the survival of us all in Canada. Francophones in Quebec have helped to differentiate us from the Americans. We owe them that. We are a different country largely because of them. And anyone who says that we can take this out of Canada and everything will remain the same is wrong. Never mind about being politically correct. The truth is right there.

Mr. de Savoye: Mr. Speaker, I will respond to this. First, I respect the cultural solidarity mentioned by the hon. member. However, I do not have much respect for his mathematical skills.

Let us take his first argument. Indeed, Quebec is certainly, for French-speakers outside its borders, an important focal point, and it will continue to be unless the Government of Canada tries to enforce a violent opposition to it, which I doubt.

● (1325)

Now, for the mathematical part. The National Capital Region is not only the Ottawa side, it also includes, whether you like it or not, the other side of the river, that is Hull and Gatineau. You know that, Mr. Speaker, I am sure. When the hon. member says that bilingual public servants in the National Capital area serve a Franco-Ontarian population, I expect they also serve a Quebec population. Otherwise, this would be tantamount to abuse.

This aside, when I compared Quebec with the rest of Canada, I took care to say, and I repeat, that I was excluding the National Capital area, both from Quebec and from the rest of Canada. I am therefore comparing apples with apples and oranges with oranges. However, the hon. member may find it to his advantage to skew reality. As he said, let us leave political correctness aside and let us show things as they are. We give 57 per cent more service to English-speaking persons in Quebec, than French-speaking persons receive in the rest of Canada.

[English]

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member for Portneuf who is always able to put his thoughts together and present them in such an engaging way.

Does the member for Portneuf think there is even a prayer of a chance that the French fact will be able to survive outside Quebec even to the degree that it does today if Quebec were to decide to separate. Why would the rest of Canada treat the French minority outside Quebec any differently from any other linguistic minority? Why should it treat it any differently in the absence of Quebec?

I would also ask the member for Portneuf to comment on the fact that we feel we have an obligation to represent and to be considerate of the French language minorities particularly in the west. The reality of the situation is that the French language minority in my city is the third, fourth or fifth language. It comes after Ukrainian and now Chinese. How should these minorities be treated vis-à-vis English and vis-à-vis French?

The hon. member also mentioned the disparity in incomes and that the income of French speaking Canadians in Quebec has gone up over the last few years relative to French speaking Canadians outside Quebec. I wonder if that could not be in part