

National Arts Centre

[Translation]

Mr. Mongrain: Mr. Chairman, being responsible of this discussion to some extent, since I moved the first amendment to that act, it would be proper that I draw certain conclusions. I will briefly try to stress certain statements made in this house since we started discussing this bill and to clear up certain points because I noticed that some of those who spoke during the debate did not understand very well what it was all about; finally, I shall express my views concerning this bill.

Mr. Chairman, no doubt you remember my suggestion that at least three of the nine directors at the National Arts Centre, be French speaking.

Since then sub-amendments have been moved which I find satisfactory because what I really am after is not a figure but a principle.

As can be seen on page 6223 of the official report, the Secretary of State made this statement which I read in English so as not to misquote:

[English]

Over a period of years it would operate as a strait-jacket, and it would mean that there never would be more than three members of French persuasion.

[Translation]

We wanted, at least in the amendment I moved and in the sub-amendment being moved now, that the principle of bilingualism be respected. The hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey) rose twice during the debate, and spoke very strongly against the fact that we should insist that recognition be given in our statutes to this principle we hold sacred, the fact of two founding nations, of two partners in confederation. His speech could be approved to the end since he spoke of mutual understanding and tolerance; he mentioned the fact that the French Canadians of the riding of Verdun have said it time and time again, which proves that we, French Canadians, do have a sense of co-operation and good feeling. I feel that, to be logical, the hon. member for Verdun could have concluded by saying that, if it is true that French Canadians are tolerant, that they understand mutual good feeling, he recognizes himself that until now they may not have been as well represented in the public service as they are entitled to be. So, let us draw our own conclusions. Let us then lay down principles in bills. Several speeches were then made. The speech of the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Starr) struck me this afternoon; he

pointed out that some members felt very strongly about this bill. I think he showed a lot of conviction himself and at one point he said:

[English]

As I understand it, if this amendment passes the members of the board will be composed of people who represent the two cultures of Canada.

After all, there are six million Canadians who have ethnic backgrounds other than French and English, who are proud to be Canadians and who want to participate in the cultural life of their country.

[Translation]

After all, we have no objection to that, Mr. Chairman, on the contrary, we accept new Canadians. But when they came to Canada, they had to make a choice. They knew that there were two partners in confederation: the French speaking and English speaking partners. They have chosen one side or the other and in that choice we respect their aspirations, we accept them as fellow-citizens on the same footing and we do not want to get rid of them at all, but it should not be deduced from that argument that French Canadians must be treated as new Canadians.

Mr. Chairman, I think that some members precisely think that the French Canadians should be treated as a new Canadian. And I draw this conclusion from the speech of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) who, on page 6252 of *Hansard* of June 10, stated referring to Canadians from German or Dutch extraction:

[English]

They were the earliest of Canadians, which is often forgotten.

[Translation]

Well, Mr. Chairman, my ancestors did not arrive here in 1753, but in 1629, that is 125 years before 1753. Therefore, we have, and I say so, and this is true for most of my Quebec fellow-citizens, the right of first occupancy. We also have a right of co-signatory to a pact accepted and ratified several times since 1763, and that is what we want respected, while we note that, for the last 100 years, this was not done as we had a right to expect.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to digress here and say that I would not want to put passion in my documentation. I want it to be known in this house that I am a Canadian, and that I believe in Canada's unity, unity in diversity, while respecting of course the rights of all. I do not believe in separatism, Mr. Chairman, but I know, for instance, that in my province, we have angry young men who are