

Government Orders

But enough of that. I invite the members of the opposition to go to Grosse-Île, in the Magdalen Islands, and see for themselves in what condition that small English school is today. I am sure the story would make the front page of Quebec newspapers.

• (1340)

We were talking about a meeting place of ideas. We know that English is spoken by more than 800 million people in the world and that there are more than 20 million who speak it right here Canada. That is where this meeting place of ideas, new found solidarity comes from. That is what we find in Canada. When you have a chance to travel, as I have had the privilege of doing for decades, you can always appreciate the bilingualism, the biculturalism, the openness and tolerance of Canada. This is something we must never forget.

When I see how weak the nationalist philosophy, the separatist philosophy is, I find it sad that they do not realize that it is because of the federal presence that Quebec has been able to find its identity. We never hear the opposition talk about the contribution of the Canadian government to Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board, the CBC or independent productions. We never hear the opposition talk about that. All it does is constantly deny the facts and knock what makes this country what it is.

There is much to be done and I think it is interesting that the learning of the second language, as I have said earlier—in survey after survey, we realize that more than 75 per cent of Canadians are in favour of institutional bilingualism.

Mr. Chrétien (Frontenac): You should come to my riding and see if that is the case.

Mr. Gagnon: Madam Speaker, it is the hon. member of the opposition who should come to my riding.

[*English*]

I am going to turn to the English language. I have been privileged and I hope I am sharing this with a number of other young Canadians. I have seen here a number of anglophones who have names like McClarty, McPherson, who have names that are of Asian origin, who are now taking the leap toward bilingualism, who are now moving beyond bilingualism because they can now master three and four languages. That is the strength of Canada.

It is a privilege to speak in this forum today in both official languages because bilingualism is not only a tool for our regional and economic development but is also a part of who we are. In doing so we now can pick from the French culture, from the English culture, from the other cultures around the world that have come here to work as one. That is one of the fundamental issues that will be discussed in the upcoming Quebec referendum.

It will be up to the separatists to prove that Canada does not work. I am from the Gaspé peninsula which is 96 per cent French speaking. I attended French schools but I had the opportunity of mingling with English friends. I have had the opportunity of moving on. I have had the opportunity of exchanging with all Canadians from all walks of life. There is not one person in Canada I have met whom I do not like.

I think Canadians are understanding. We are a tolerant society and regrettably the opposition, including some members from the Reform Party, is not aware of the fortitude, of the fact that being a Canadian is more than a privilege, it is something other countries wish they had.

Obviously the opposition will have the opportunity to react, not only following this speech but in the upcoming referendum.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lebel: Start with liking Quebecers.

Mr. Gagnon: “Start with liking Quebecers”—Madam Speaker, can you beat that? It bothers them to hear a young person like me identify himself as a Canadian of French origin, a Canadian who went to the trouble of learning the second language, who took the trouble to travel, visit and study with English Canadians. Sometimes it hurts the separatists to hear that. Unfortunately, we live in a changing world and unfortunately the opposition is unable to meet the challenge of Canadian federalism.

I have heard all kinds of speeches from the opposition, on Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, St. Laurent, on real French Canadians, good Canadians who built and implemented programs from which I benefit.

• (1345)

This brings me to an important point on the official languages in Canada. Let us look at the efforts made by Pierre Elliott Trudeau to have the French fact recognized, to be served—yes, maybe not as well as we would like in Bonaventure or Montreal or other places—but I think this recognition of the French fact by the rest of Canada, of the existence of French, and promoting the language—it is an incredible achievement of our Liberal predecessors.

Let us talk about another great Canadian, a great Quebecer—

Mr. Chrétien (Frontenac): René Lévesque.

Mr. Gagnon: René Lévesque. You have it: René Lévesque, who grew up about 30 kilometres from my home town of New Carlisle, in the Gaspé peninsula.

Like René Lévesque, I come from Gaspé but, unfortunately, none of us can pretend to be Gaspésians first and foremost. This is very interesting. I can tell you that: René Lévesque was among the first to recognize the importance of speaking both French and English. He was open to the world.