

*Adjournment Debate*

to promote national unity. But at the time, such steps have been taken to defend the rights of linguistic minorities. The program was renewed in 1979. At first, it applied only in cases of legal proceedings under Sections 33 and 193 of the Constitution Act of 1867, and under Section 23 of the Manitoba Act, because at the time those were the only provisions under which the official languages had constitutional guarantees. Section 93 protects denominational schools, whereas Section 133 of the Constitution Act of 1867 and Section 23 of the Manitoba Act uphold the right to use English and French in the Parliament of Canada, in the various legislative assemblies, the National Assembly of Quebec and the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, as well as in the courts of both instances.

[English]

Since December 1982 when the court challenges program was updated, eight cases have been approved for financial assistance, the details of which have been provided to the Hon. Member on a previous occasion. As mentioned previously in the House by the Secretary of State (Mr. McLean), there is an ongoing discussion between the Department of Justice and the Department of the Secretary of State in order to study the various options open to the Government with respect to the court challenges program. The question of the continuity of the court—

[Translation]

—and I conclude by saying, Mr. Speaker, that we intend to make every effort in coming days and weeks, and you may rest assured that the Secretary of State will take position so that the rights of minorities will be upheld throughout Canada.

PUBLIC WORKS—EXPROPRIATION OF LAND AT MIRABEL—  
GOVERNMENT POSITION

**Mrs. Lise Bourgault (Argenteuil-Papineau):** Mr. Speaker, on March 3, 1985, I put a question to the Minister of Public Works (Mr. La Salle) concerning the proposal submitted by this Government to the expropriated Mirabel landowners, because all my constituents of Argenteuil-Papineau are directly concerned with this issue.

Mr. Speaker, on the day following the signature of a Memorandum of Agreement between the CIAC and this Government on the rectifying of that gigantic blunder, it seems most important to me that this House should be cognizant of this comprehensive proposal, in view of the astronomical costs to the public treasury of maintaining and managing those lands, namely some \$50 million a year. Located some 45 minutes away from Montreal, in between the four major centres of Saint-Jérôme, Saint-Eustache, Sainte-Thérèse and Lachute, the prime farmlands of Mirabel, comprising over 2,500 UTH, had shaped its people to the image of a prosperity.

● (1830)

Progress, however, had decided that in this area favoured by nature, agriculture should give way to something else. The

mere mention of that progress now puts the whole people on edge. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, in 1969, with one stroke of a pen this Government decision put an end to those 150 years of tradition and brought the whole Mirabel area back to the year 1867 by degrading its residents and landowners down to the level of tenants. Canada's biggest expropriation operation, second only to the one that dispossessed the Indians, brought havoc in the lives of approximately 10,000 people living in twelve villages or fourteen municipalities, covering an area as wide as the Île Jésus. It does not happen every day that 97,000 acres of land suddenly change hands.

And the new owner was not easy to get along with. In sixteen years, he changed faces and policies a number of times. There were seven successive directors, delegated by the Federal Government to manage the land and the people in the Mirabel reserve.

One such director stated he had no authority to make decisions. Another acted in a more high-handed way. What one allowed, the next one forbade. Leave given by one director was not valid in the eyes of another. At times there were written permissions, at other times oral permissions, or benevolent silence with indications to proceed as before.

Mr. Speaker, it is in such a climate of confusion and insecurity that my constituents in Mirabel have had to survive, waiting for the situation to clear up and become normal again. It is not easy to live in expectancy during sixteen long years.

Mr. Speaker, the Mirabel tragedy is that the area has ceased to live and progress for fifteen years. During all those years, a prosperous and promising area was literally sacrificed to the ambition of an incompetent and hard-nosed Government. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the displacement of 10,000 persons and especially the social disruption of 97,000 acres present a situation almost identical to that of the displaced persons in Europe following the Second World War, or to the deportation of the Acadians.

The impact of such a social upheaval cannot be assessed, especially in such an economically and demographically integrated area.

Mr. Speaker, in Quebec farming communities, economic and social life is, to a great extent, related to agricultural activities. The land is set aside for agricultural use and the village is the focus of services and business; it is also the preferred setting for retirement or for those who do not earn their living directly through farming.

Like everywhere else, the villages acquired the services and businesses they needed. The village of Sainte-Scholastique, because of its geographical location, had become a major agricultural centre for other villages. The presence of two doctors, two notaries, one pharmacist, four grocery stores, three hardware stores and a farm equipment dealer shows how important this centre was in 1969. The structure of these parishes based on networks of near neighbours, relatives,