

**Greater Quebec Movement's Testimony before the National Assembly's Commission
des institutions on Bill 1**

December 4th 8:30 pm

(Proceedings resume at 8:34 p.m.)

(The Chair) Mr. Bachand:

So, please, the Commission will resume its work. We are pleased to welcome the representatives of the *Greater Quebec Movement*. Namely, Mr. Smith, Mr. D'Andrea, and Mr. White. Mr. D'Andrea, I believe you will be making the opening presentation. I remind you that you have eight minutes, after which there will be a period of discussion with all the representatives of the *Greater Quebec Movement*. The floor is yours.

Giuliano D'Andrea:

Thank you. We are very happy to be here. My greetings to everyone. I will begin with a short story. In our movement, we always start with a story.

Once upon a time, there was a mountaineer named Don Gusto, a historic Anglo-Québécois, who decided to go climbing in Charlevoix on a via ferrata. During his climb, he tripped and fell, and fortunately, he had a rope and was left hanging 100 metres above the ground. He looked up: there were another 100 metres to climb, and he tried, but he couldn't. In his despair, he set aside his secularism and decided to pray: "Help!" he said. "Is there anyone up there?"

Suddenly, the wind began to blow, the clouds parted, and a voice came from the sky saying:

"I can save you if you believe in me."

Don Gusto was astonished. He said:

"Yes, yes, save me! What must I do?"

And the voice replied:

"If you believe in me, let go of the rope."

Don Gusto looked down, looked up, thought for a moment, and then replied:

"Is there anyone else up there?"

This is somewhat the dilemma of the anglophone community. We are a bit like Don Gusto, trapped on a rope. On one side, the voice is somewhat the institutions of Québec. We receive good suggestions, but we are afraid. We don't know what to do. We hold on to the rope.

If Alexis de Tocqueville were alive today and wanted to define the anglophone community, he would probably have difficulty doing so, because ethnically they are all different—many differences of religion, ethnicity, culture, and language. And yet, it is a community. And, like Don Gusto, it is a community proudly attached to Québec.

Sometimes we hear voices within the community—usually from a very negative sector—that would rather victimize itself than speak, sit down, and try to engage in genuine exchanges between communities. And as spokesperson for the movement, I can tell you that Québécois, Anglo-Québécois, and the minorities we represent are proudly Québécois in our own way —proudly Québécois.

If we have experienced difficulties in the past, they have had a great deal to do with language. And we ask ourselves—our movement has existed for 30 years—and we are now saying: listen, the French language is not well mastered by our community. And yet, there is this *Madame la Marquise* song—“Everything is fine, everything is fine”—within our institutions, which is false. Things are not fine; they are going badly.

Many Québécois from our community want to leave Québec—or at least that is what they tell the media. But we are convinced that we want to stay. We want to contribute. We are Québécois.

And we would have liked to be able to discuss things a little more, in meetings with other Québécois, to talk about the Constitution. We have suggestions. We have ideas to put forward.

And I will now yield the floor to Mr. White, who can suggest some of the ideas the movement is proud of.

The Chair (Mr. Bachand):

Thank you, Mr. White. You have a little more than three minutes remaining.

Mr. Peter White:

Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission, Mr. Chairman, it is a great pleasure to see you again. My name is Peter White. And I thank you for your invitation to be a witness before you.

I am speaking to you from my home in the Town of Brome Lake, in the Eastern Townships. And I am wearing my tie from Laval University.

I would like to very briefly present to you tonight a theoretical framework for the concept of a national minority, drawn from the book *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, published by the brilliant young Canadian political theorist Will Kymlicka, by Clarendon Press, Oxford, in 1995.

A national minority exists wherever we observe, within a given state, the coexistence of several nations, where the term *nation* means a historical community that is more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, and possessing a distinct language, culture, and a shared will to live together.

In this sociological sense, the notion of nation is closely linked to that of a people or a culture, and such a nation is not founded on descent or blood. Consequently, a country in which more than one nation lives is not a nation-state, but a multinational state. Smaller cultures form national minorities.

We therefore maintain that anglophone Québécois constitute a national minority within the multinational state of Québec, just as francophone Québécois constitute a national minority within the multinational state of Canada.

In a multinational state, the Constitution is, among other things, a contract between the minority or minorities and the majority, defining the terms that have been negotiated and agreed upon by the various parties for the purpose of jointly establishing and building the enterprise or adventure of their country. All parties must therefore formally approve these terms.

Incidentally, we must always remember that the National Assembly of Québec has never officially ratified the Constitution Act of 1982.

To feel secure within a larger dominant culture, a national minority requires five guarantees:

1. Formal recognition of its existence as a legitimate national minority within society as a whole, and formal recognition of its legitimate right to cultural continuity within the majority community.
2. A clear and formal definition—subscribed to by both the minority and the majority—of the characteristics that distinguish the national minority from the majority, which the minority seeks to preserve and protect from assimilation and homogenization, and which the majority agrees to recognize and respect.
3. The unquestionable right to self-government in areas that are essential to its identity.
4. The unquestionable right to representation within the central institutions of the majority community.
5. And finally, the right of veto over any constitutional amendment that could be detrimental to any constitutional protection of the rights it has acquired as a national

minority—or, in other words, the mandatory consent of each party to contractual changes affecting its rights or status.

This is a clause normally found in any form of contract.

Thank you for your attention. I now return the floor to Mr. D'Andrea.

The Chair (Mr. Bachand):

We will now move to the exchange period. Thank you very much, Mr. White and Mr. D'Andrea. Mr. Minister, please proceed for a nine-minute period.

Mr. Jolin-Barrette:

Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Smith, Mr. D'Andrea, Mr. White, good evening. Thank you for taking part in the work of the Commission. At the end of your brief, I note that you indicate that this is a step forward, namely the Constitutional Act, 2025. Is that correct?

Giuliano D'Andrea:

Oh yes! Absolutely. You know, Mr. Smith and I were at the Bélanger-Campeau Commission where there was the Youth Commission. At that time—35 years ago—we were already talking about a Québec constitution. And as representatives of the anglophone community, we said: it's time to talk. It's a good idea. We can exchange ideas.

Thirty years ago, during the commission on the referendum law in 1995, we appeared once again and spoke about the Constitution. We have been talking about the Constitution consistently over the past 30 years. But the problem is that, within our community, there are difficulties, as I said earlier. And that comes from both sides.

On the one hand, I see a bill here that reflects very well the thinking of a large portion of Québécois. But another portion of Québécois does not see itself reflected in these texts; they did not contribute to them. What would be interesting would be to pause, perhaps hold broader consultations, and try to bring together all Québécois so that they, too, can be proud of having a Québec constitution. But that requires a broader consultation.

Mr. Jolin-Barrette:

I hear you. We are currently holding public hearings and consulting. But you just said that a large portion of people do see themselves in it, while another portion of the population does not. Can you identify what elements, in your view, explain why they do not see themselves in it? What is missing?

Giuliano D’Andrea:

Well, we can resort to stereotypes; perhaps that helps clear the ground a bit. In the 1960s and 1970s, we constantly talked about the “two solitudes.” And what I find in my community—even though it speaks French and wants to be engaged—is that there are concepts that are somewhat different from ours: whether it’s the concept of family, concepts relating to language, or the feeling we sometimes have that we are—you know—there’s the train, and then there’s the little caboose at the back. And the anglophones are there. The train moves forward; it’s the locomotive. And we’re being pulled along with the projects.

So it really comes down to a lack of participation. Even though there are unifying aspects—women’s rights, freedom of expression, many shared values, even the fundamental idea of a constitution as a social contract. But at its core, a social contract means negotiating with communities. It means reaching out to those communities to hear their ideas and to discuss. As anglophones, we did not see that gesture. And it’s not the government’s fault, nor the National Assembly’s. Our community itself is divided. Perhaps what we need is a kind of general assembly of the anglophone community to begin—of Montréal, for instance—but we need to start communicating. That is what is missing.

Mr. Jolin-Barrette:

This evening, Mr. D’Andrea, you are here with your organization, and I am trying—let’s suppose we want to improve things in light of your comments—to understand what, in your view, is missing. You mentioned the family, but in the 2025 bill there is no element dealing with the family, except for the provision that the State protects the best interests of the child, which is a well-established concept in our laws, particularly following reforms to family law and the youth protection system.

You also spoke about language. In your brief, I read a passage where you refer to so-called historic anglophones. You state that the government deliberately chose to restrict the size of this group while marginalizing it in relation to the francophone majority, even going so far as to question its legitimacy. One could conclude that the historic anglophone population constitutes an exclusive group whose rights are protected and defined by the majority—respected, certainly—but whose members are never truly included within the broader majority. As a result, a fiction is created: possession of a certificate of eligibility, rather than belonging to a culture or a history, becomes the true criterion. Thus, even an English prince, such as Prince Harry, deciding to settle in Québec would be granted fewer rights than thousands of Italians, Greeks, and others who have obtained this certificate and are

therefore considered historic anglophones. The irony of this situation would be amusing if it were not simply insulting.

What is being described there, essentially, is Bill 101, which requires all immigrants to Québec to attend French-language schools. Should I understand that you disagree with Bill 101?

Giuliano D'Andrea:

No. No, that's not it. Not at all. In fact, if you read our brief, the only area where we may disagree with the education system is that we believe we should have—and we have always advocated for—integrated schools. Bill 101 creates, in a way, a segregation of communities. There is the anglophone community with its schools, which is fine, and the francophone majority with its schools, but between the two, there is sometimes not enough contact.

(8:50 p.m.)

So, imagine our situation: we play with our friends in French, we work with our friends in French, we can marry francophones, but we have to be educated in two different systems—when perhaps we could have a pilot project offering a system in which both linguistic communities could exchange ideas and truly become masters of the French language.

And within our community—and I want to conclude on this—it is not enough for us simply to learn French; we must master it. Because if we do not master French, what happens? We leave. That is the problem.

The Chair (Mr. Bachand):

Fifty seconds, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Jolin-Barrette:

Well, I agree with you that the glue of Québec society is learning and speaking French, while preserving the rights of the anglophone community. Moreover, the linguistic regime in the Constitution Act, 1867 is based on that principle. Young anglophones who wish to study in French-language schools are able to do so. We did not deliberately decide to establish two separate systems; it was a request from the anglophone community. So I understand you to be saying that there may be a need for reflection within the anglophone community about having a single education system?

Giuliano D’Andrea:

Yes, but at the same time—we’re still—well—we would like to attend French-language schools, but if we do that, we lose our rights. So, there is also a reflection to be had. Could we not have a system in which generational rights are not lost? I have—

The Chair (Mr. Bachand):

Thank you, Mr. D’Andrea. Thank you. I must now give the floor to the Member for Acadie. Mr. Member for Acadie, please.

Mr. Morin:

Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. D’Andrea, Mr. White, thank you for being with the Commission this evening, and thank you for your brief. Mr. D’Andrea, I will allow you to finish what you were saying earlier.

Giuliano D’Andrea:

What was I saying? I’ve forgotten.

Mr. Morin:

It was in response to a question from the Minister. You were speaking about schools.

Giuliano D’Andrea:

Yes, yes. Listen—I attended an English-language school; I started during the Saint-Léonard crisis. In Saint-Léonard, we had bilingual schools before the crisis, and those were shut down. Because of the tensions, bilingual schools were eliminated, and English- and French-language schools were established instead. As an Italian community, we went toward English-language schools—not because we didn’t want to learn French. We were even misled; my parents were told: don’t worry, they’ll learn French. The reality is that some who came out of that system spoke French very poorly—excuse the expression, but it’s the reality.

And when we ask why so many Québécois left Québec, it’s because they were unable to find work in French here, because we never valued learning French at an expert level. In minority communities everywhere, the first thing parents tell their children is: it’s not enough for you to be equal—you have to be better, because you are a newcomer, or Québécois, or Canadian, or something else. In our community, we should have done that. We didn’t.

We advocated for schools—we may not have fully pushed the idea of integrated schools—but at least we wanted the debate, that utopian way of thinking that maybe Québécois children could attend the same schools together, without falling into the idea suggested by

the Minister: yes, but you can attend French-language schools. I know we can attend French-language schools, but minorities do not want to lose the rights they have.

Mr. Morin:

Mr. D'Andrea, I understand that your organization, the Greater Quebec Movement, is not opposed to a Québec constitution.

Giuliano D'Andrea:

No.

Mr. Morin:

If there had been a cross-party commission before a draft bill was produced—one that consulted Québécois more broadly—would that be something your community and your movement would have appreciated?

Giuliano D'Andrea:

Absolutely. Absolutely. That is what we had been seeking for years.

Mr. Morin:

Because we understand that a constitution is first and foremost a document—you mentioned it—it is a contract, but it is a contract of the people, by the people.

Giuliano D'Andrea:

Yes.

Mr. Morin:

Not a government contract.

Giuliano D'Andrea:

No.

Mr. Morin:

All right. So that is something that would, in fact, have helped legitimize government action.

Giuliano D'Andrea :

Yes, absolutely. And it would also have legitimized the Constitution itself. You know, in the brief I spoke a bit about Rocky Balboa. Who is Rocky Balboa? He's a little Italian guy from Philadelphia who later becomes a champion. But he's not Italian-American—he's American;

he feels American. It's the same for us: we are Québécois, and we must feel Québécois. We can be proud of our origins, but in the end, we are Québécois. And we are not asking others to tell us, "Yes, yes, you are Québécois." We want to assume that identity and take our place.

Mr. Morin:

Thank you. In the text before us, there is a preamble stating that the State of Québec intends to pursue this objective while respecting the institutions of the Québec community. The English expression makes no further reference to the anglophone community, and it speaks of respect for institutions rather than respect for the community itself. How did you receive that?

The Chair (Mr. Bachand):

...seconds.

Giuliano D'Andrea:

In our community—well, there's a saying. Francophones say: don't touch Bill 101. Anglophones say: don't touch our institutions. At the same time, many anglophones say: okay, but our institutions need reform, because they are not doing the job they should be doing. So, when I hear talk of institutions and rights, yes, that's true—but we must also think about the Québécois who use those institutions, and those institutions must meet their needs. It's nuanced.

The Chair (Mr. Bachand):

Thank you very much. Member for Saint-Henri—Sainte-Anne, please. One minute and 53 seconds.

Mr. Cliche-Rivard:

Thank you very much for your presentation. There are two things—and I want to reconcile them to make sure I understand correctly. On the one hand, you say that despite your concerns, you believe Bill No. 1 is a step in the right direction. On the other hand, you recommend that the bill be postponed and that genuine consultations take place. So, I just want to make sure I fully understand and give you the opportunity to explain.

Giuliano D'Andrea:

We are very pleased that there is, at least today, a push toward a Québec constitution. We've done it, we've said it, we're here, we're talking, and within my community, we're talking too—because it's now a reality. That said, yes, in principle we are pleased, but the details—

Mr. Cliche-Rivard:

More complicated.

Giuliano D’Andrea:

They’re complicated, and things are missing. We would like many other Québécois to be able to share their voices and ideas. That’s it.

Mr. Cliche-Rivard:

You do speak about deepening divisions and marginalized populations. Is that how the community feels?

Giuliano D’Andrea:

Yes. And you’ll hear it in the media—the drums, the tom-toms will grow louder—because once again the anglophone community will be portrayed as a victim, and the discussion will collapse.

Mr. Cliche-Rivard:

Thank you for your time today. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Bachand):

Thank you. Member for Jean-Talon, please.

Mr. Paradis:

Thank you. It’s interesting, because at the beginning of these consultations we saw Mr. Smith proudly wave the Québec flag on screen, and you echo that gesture—we see him doing it again—and you echo it in your remarks when you say: we are proud Québécois. But like many Québécois, you did not feel heard in the document before you. You say that a portion of Québécois, like yourselves, did not contribute to these texts. And what you are asking for today is—well, here we are in the formal framework of a general consultation at the National Assembly, and you want more than that. You want real dialogue.

(9:00 p.m.)

Giuliano D’Andrea:

Yes, absolutely. I can’t add anything to what you’ve said—that’s exactly it.

Mr. Paradis:

So, to continue in the same vein as my colleague, you're saying that we don't have the right document in front of us and that we need to start over in order to have a real democratic process in which you feel included.

Giuliano D'Andrea:

Yes. It's a good gesture, it's a good project, because it gets us talking today. But in principle, we've talked—now, in the details, we need a deeper reflection. That's what—

The Chair (Mr. Bachand):

Thank you very much. Mr. Smith, Mr. White, Mr. D'Andrea, thank you very much for being with us. It has been very, very much appreciated.

The Commission therefore adjourns its work until Friday, December 5, following the notices regarding the work of committees, at which time it will continue its mandate. Thank you very much. Have a pleasant evening.

(The meeting adjourned at 9:01 p.m.)