

Statement by William Johnson, President of Alliance Quebec

Friday, November 19, 1999 - There are two Quebecs: The Quebec, land of freedom, which gave us the Quebec Charter and then the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Quebec, land of the language ayatollahs.

The Quebec of the charters of freedom won the day on Oct. 20 by the judgment in the Lyon and the Wallrus case. Madame Judge Danielle Côté ruled that freedom is the norm in a free and democratic society and restrictions on the freedoms protected by the charters must be justified by showing an urgent necessity. The government side failed to present evidence that limiting freedom of expression on commercial signs was an urgent necessity, and so the judge struck down the sign law.

Normally, all further prosecutions should be suspended until the case has followed its course to a final decision. But the government, seeking to maintain a climate of repression with regard to the English language, chose, instead, to pursue a complaint against Bill's Plumbing and Heating Inc. for a violation of the sign law because he had English words as well as French on his truck.

This is just another instance of the government using the law and the courts to intimidate and deprive people of their rights rather than to maintain the law and a state of justice. We know of several other cases where the government has brought charges against people who are too intimidated, fearing reprisals, to defend themselves in court in spite of their conviction that they would win a favourable court judgment in the end. Intimidation, when you have all the means of a government, works, but it is still illegitimate.

We call on the government to suspend all action under the sign law until justice has spoken finally and definitively. We believe that, in the end, freedom and justice will triumph over repression, in the terms that Judge Côté so eloquently expressed in her judgment on the Lyon and the Wallrus.