The Address—Mr. Trudeau

And we all know very well, Mr. Speaker, that the PQ government will not accept any proposal for change. No proposal for a constitutional change will be accepted by a party whose goal it is to break the country.

● (1720)

So, Mr. Speaker, I submit respectfully to everybody, including members of my own party and of the Pepin-Robarts Commission, that this third option business is a trap we should not fall into. So much, Mr. Speaker, for the general problem of Quebec within Confederation.

I would now like to address myself to the specific problem of the specific needs of Quebec in the area of language and culture. Well, our policy in that area is as follows: there are in this respect two fundamental and inseparable dimensions. The French language and culture must be preserved in the province of Quebec, but it must also be preserved among the French-speaking minorities in the other provinces, in the same way as we suggest that the English-speaking majority in the other provinces must of course ensure the preservation of its own language and culture in the province of Quebec for the English-speaking minority. Why? For a very simple reason: if the problem of minorities is not resolved, we are once again caught in the trap of separatism, be it from Quebec or elsewhere. Why? Because if Quebec is going to be unilingual in French and the other provinces unilingual in English, if the minorities on both sides are not protected what is going to happen? We will have two solitudes, two nations, two political groups more or less homogenous each looking for powers and a status to protect their majority, unmindful of their minority. That is why these two dimensions are absolutely essential. If we choose those easy solutions as: Well, let Quebecers speak French and let people speak English in the other provinces, I say this is potential separatism, separatism in the short term, Mr. Speaker. And that is the reason for all our initiatives as a Liberal government with regard to the French fact in Quebec as well as in the other provinces.

We recognize and we are willing to recognize that particular case and, as I said earlier, we have proposed to do so in constitutional arrangements, by special guarantees. Especially in March 1976, I proposed to all provinces certain arrangements to guarantee in the Constitution that the French fact will be inalienable in Quebec by any government, any administration, any federal Parliament. That is why we said that certain provisions in Bill 22 and Bill 101, tended to recognize in the province of Quebec some values essential to the protection of the French language. We have condemned and we still condemn those bills because generally speaking, they are inspired by a restrictive sense of public liberties. However, we have recognized the validity of Quebec aspirations expressed by all provincial governments in Quebec over a long period of time, that the French language and culture should freely develop in that province.

That was our first attitude concerning the particular case of Quebec. As I just mentioned, the second is that we must absolutely protect the minority's rights, and that is why as

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soon as the historic agreement of St. Andrews, where the nine prime ministers of the English provinces agreed to help their French-speaking minorities, that is why at that time, I tried to find a way to permanently guarantee that agreement. But the Prime Minister of Quebec had himself proposed some agreements, some arrangements between the provincial governments. It was not bad for a start, and it was a way to obtain immediate arrangements which would guarantee the rights of French speaking people in the other provinces against a similar guarantee for the anglophones in Quebec, but the obvious flaw was that these arrangements were only temporary ones. This is the reason why, Mr. Speaker, I suggested that the government keep advocating and this is part of our policy, that the rights of minorities be written in our Constitution, so that they become definitely inalienable, and cannot be abolished through a whim or arbitrary decision by any government.

I have neither the time nor desire to dwell on the proposal in detail at this time but I would be very pleased to do so in a subsequent debate if, as I think, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) does not see the merit of this constitutional proposal right now.

Now, our third approach to this particular problem is the Official Languages Act and the federal official languages policy which aim at placing French and English on an equal footing. I regret that in this area we have not reached an agreement yet with the Official Opposition and especially with its Leader. If I am not mistaken, in his speech about the national unity debate which took place on the 5th of July, he said more or less that bilingualism does not unite Canadians.

● (1722)

[English]

Bilingualism does not unite Canadians, it divides, but we must build unity despite differences and not on bilingualism.

[Translation]

These are sincere points of view which must be respected but which I cannot help denounce. On our side, we do not consider bilingualism, or the Official Languages Act or the policy of equality for the official languages as a necessary evil. On the contrary we consider it as a goal to achieve, as something positive that enhances Canada, as something our country cannot do without. History could have been different, but it was not.

This country was, in its origin and in its existence, actually founded on the reality of two linguistic communities. Reality could have been different if history had been different, if Jacques Cartier had landed somewhere else than Canada, but since this reality exists, we on this side of the House say that Canada cannot exist without this equality for both languages. Furthermore, we are made for bilingualism, if I can put it that way, Mr. Speaker. Not only is it not an evil that must be endured, but it is the very condition of our existence.

In early July, the Secretary of State made in Ottawa a speech that I noted, that dealt in detail with this problem. He gave an example which I often like to use: Since humanity has