

*The Constitution*

the same as mine. The unique experience was that most of them did not have a special interest in minority language education or the official languages. For instance, Professor Irwin Cotter of the Canadian Jewish Congress pleaded eloquently for the linguistic rights of francophones and anglophones. J. P. Nelligan of the Canadian Bar Association came before the committee and said:

The Constitution should guarantee the right of a parent to have English or French as the language of instruction of his children in publicly supported schools in areas where the number of people speaking that language warrants this course.

The National Congress of Italians came before the committee and their spokesman, Antonio Sciascia, said:

Well, if we want to put into effect what we preach, which is bilingualism, then we have to start implementing that policy somewhere, and I think that if we treat the francophones in Ontario the same way that the anglophones are treated in Quebec, then I think that would be a good start.

His Worship Mayor Dennis Flynn of Etobicoke, on behalf of the national executive of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities went much further than anything in this resolution on the question of minority language rights.

I am not quoting l'Association Canadienne-Française de l'Ontario, and I am not talking about what the Council of Quebec Minorities said. I am telling the House what an Italian organization, a Jewish organization, an august board of lawyers and an Ontario mayor with an Irish-sounding name said. We are all Canadians and we share a common understanding of Canada. I left that committee with a good feeling. I thought we all agreed on the merit of two official languages. I thought we all agreed on the merit of minority education.

Then I came back to the House, and on March 3, 1981, I heard the Progressive Conservative member for Simcoe South (Mr. Stewart) say:

Unfortunately, no one pointed out that the Durham report recommended the union of Upper and Lower Canada and the use of one federal language, English. Had this been adhered to, we would not be having this acrimonious debate in the House today.

I could not believe my ears. At first I thought that what the hon. member meant was that in 1867, if the Fathers of Confederation had applied a broader brush, we would not be having a language problem today. But that is not what he meant, and it took me a few minutes to realize it. Many hon. members were in the House that day. What he meant was that in 1867 they made a mistake in making French an official language along with English in certain provinces, and giving certain French-speaking Canadians some official status in this country.

Well, he is one Member of Parliament from Ontario and I am another Member of Parliament from Ontario, and I say to him through you, Mr. Speaker, that he is wrong. I say, that the mistake of 1867 will be rectified. I say to the hon. member that the pleas of Sir Wilfrid Laurier will be heard in 1981. I say, that this time, through Sections 16 to 23, we will enshrine in the Constitution, once and for all, the official language of this nation and the minority language rights of its citizens.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Irwin:** It is unfortunate that, with the fall of the previous government, the energy negotiations and the constitutional debate overlap each other. I find it hard to believe, especially having sat on the joint committee with colleagues such as the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp), various members from Ontario, the west, the maritimes and New Brunswick, that we could be so pedantic and use phrases which will leave scars in this House for years to come. I keep reminding myself that if the Constitution stood by itself, or if the Charter of Rights stood by itself, this acrimony would not exist and we would agree on such fundamental principles as patriation, an amending formula and a Charter of Rights. I hope that I am right.

Prime Minister Lester Pearson once said: "The fundamental principle of Liberalism, the foundation of its faith, is belief in the dignity and worth of the individual." Notwithstanding our disagreement at this particular time, I think this basic belief is the belief of all hon. members of this House. I say now is the time to entrench that dignity and worth of the individual.

In conclusion, I want to thank each and every member of the joint committee and the support staff who worked for so many months to make this a better document. There is, however, a man I have watched anguish over each and every amendment to this constitution from the day we started to discuss it. Let there be no mistake; if there had not been such a man, there would not be the rights for the aboriginal people that there are in the Constitution now. If there had not been such a man, there would not have been rights for the handicapped. This man's vision of Canada is stamped on each and every amendment to this Constitution. He fought, he spoke, he convinced. Part of him is this charter of rights. That man is the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada (Mr. Chrétien).

● (1640)

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Irwin:** Finally, there is the man I consider to be the soul of this Constitution, one who is seldom thanked. I refer to the man who spent most of his political life working toward this day and this time; the man who, like the Phoenix of old, rose again to lead this party and this government; the man who best exemplifies our party's historical past and philosophical future; the man who has shown us the way along a difficult road. The opposition blame him, but I congratulate him. I refer to the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau).

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker):** Order, please. Before I recognize the hon. member for Brant (Mr. Blackburn) and in order to avoid interrupting him while he is speaking, perhaps I could dispose of the proceedings on the adjournment motion for this evening.