

Official Languages

spot. In fact, I hate talking through my hat. I went without sleep nights to meet English and French-speaking groups in order to get an understanding of the situation and to make allowance for it. I am sure the struggle goes back to the earlier days of colonization. Those who have read the history of Canada are aware of the hypocritical injustice done the settlers.

That is why many people, including our own children, wonder why there are still so many French Canadians in Maine and in the rest of the United States. It is because it was feared that the west might become as bilingual as Ontario, Quebec or New Brunswick. That is why almost 3 millions French-Canadian workers were prevented from owning land and that preference was given to Russians, to Poles and to Ukrainians. Not that I dislike them, of course, but in all fairness, our people should have been given at least equal advantages at the time.

Today, when we are asked to give almost the same linguistic rights to the Ukrainians and other ethnic groups, it is generally overlooked that when they came to Canada, they were requested to make the solemn promise they would speak the language of the country. And so, on arriving in Canada, they abandoned their own language, because those are the conditions imposed upon immigrants.

Today, they are happy. They all adopted the English language. We must bear the blow, but let no one tell me that the Ukrainian or the Russian will be treated in the same way as the French Canadians because an ethnic group has committed an injustice in western Canada.

Mr. Speaker, this intervention without malice summarizes certain remarks I heard and which surprised me, because they were made even by English-speaking people who do not admit this situation exists. If we want a united Canada, a strong Canada, let us start by working together, within the ethnic groups who settled Canada.

As for those who came to join us, they agreed to speak either English or French. They were entirely free. For heaven's sake, we do not want to be told today that Russian comes before French, for example, or that Polish comes before French, because we are in the West. I heard the same thing with regard to Chinese.

If we were to continue the discussion frankly, we would hear something else. Those who speak in that manner do not dare to speak too clearly. They speak about the rights

[Mr. Gauthier.]

of certain people, certain ethnic groups that are more numerous than others. I recognize that culturally they are right, but linguistically, let them admit that they are in Canada and that they must accept the decisions of the Canadian government.

Today, if parliament tries to ensure more justice, to pour balm upon the discrimination that prevailed forty years ago, it will have done something, and it can be assured that it will have my support as long as it applies that policy.

• (5:50 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, on a question of order, I rise to correct a statement made by the hon. member, I hope quite unconsciously. He indicated that I had or had not said certain things, or made certain representations. On the two previous occasions when I spoke on this bill in the house I made it quite plain that I supported the bill, and I dealt with the problems faced by the French speaking people in northern Alberta. I indicated that while I supported the bill generally as a Canadian, I had a particular reason to support it because of the difficulties of these people, many of them friends I have known for 40 years. When the hon. member indicates that I failed to make any reference to the people of French speaking ancestry in my country he is ignoring the facts, probably quite unconsciously.

[Translation]

Mr. Gauthier: I would like to answer the hon. member, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order. The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

[English]

Mr. Steven E. Paproski (Edmonton Centre): I rise to speak for the first time in this debate, Mr. Speaker, and I wish to thank the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) for a preamble to my speech. It is not my purpose at this moment to embark on a detailed dissertation or dissection of the constitutional question. I leave that to others. Besides, I feel that the constitutional issues have been underscored over and over again and are fairly well understood by Canadians from coast to coast.

I would emphasize that there is more to the question than simply the historical, traditional or constitutional aspects. It is basically and above all a question of people, a question of