

Official Languages

To solve the problem of unity in Canada, if we must go beyond the confederation structures, we must not hesitate to do so. We are all mature enough and conscious enough to know that some day or other we must come to a conclusion in this regard and do so without any animosity, in the greatest possible spirit of charity, so that we might manage to shape north of the 45th parallel a country that is truly that of all Canadians.

Mr. Pierre De Bané (Matane): Mr. Speaker, looking at the clock, I am afraid I only have a few minutes left, so I shall be very brief.

It is a pity, in a way, that the original concept of this bill which was to entrench the language rights in the constitution was not carried out earlier. Though the federal government is through this bill, legislating within the bounds of its jurisdiction, it remains that it would have been most desirable that the language rights be entrenched in the constitution, as the government said it intended to do.

However, when one hears comments such as those we have heard for the past few days from some opposition members, one tends to feel discouraged and to wonder whether this country has any future at all.

When one realizes that it took us 50 years of struggle to finally obtain, a few years ago, bilingual cheques, When we notice to-day's opposition to a bill whose only function is to allow the citizens to address themselves to the federal government in their mother tongue, I think we are right to have certain misgivings concerning the future of this country.

Obviously, there are several indirect ways to express what I would call bigotry and intolerance, such as saying that this legislation is not the best means to guarantee linguistic rights. It might be that some people have not yet understood the real scope of the legislation. But I think we must tell it as it is, whether this country remains or not united. If intolerance and bigotry supersede the highest human qualities, I think we shall have to resign ourselves to put an end to this political union.

When I think, Mr. Speaker, that today while I am speaking to you the French Canadians in the province of Quebec, in order to work for the federal government or for certain government agencies,—I am thinking especially of Air Canada—must learn English and must take courses in English; when I think that the French-Canadian civil servants who work in Ottawa can only do it in the language of Shakespeare

[Mr. Matte.]

and when on the other hand we hear people say that this is but a minor problem, that goodwill and mutual understanding are the remedies to these situations; I wonder Mr. Speaker if wool is not being pulled over our eyes. In other words, either we face facts, find solutions and pay the price for a union or we take a firm stand and put an end to a situation that would no longer make sense.

I would like to end my remarks by saying that in a hundred years from now, those who might read the reasons that have been advanced against this bill and detect the faint-heartedness the intolerance, the various forms of opposition sometimes blunt, more often subtle which were marshalled against this bill, will realize that there are still people who would like to impose an exclusively British way of life upon this country.

• (4:30 p.m.)

Mr. Théogène Ricard (Saint-Hyacinthe): Mr. Speaker, at the outset of the few remarks I should like to make on Bill C-120, I have no hesitation in saying that I shall vote for this bill when the time comes. I do not mean for all that that this measure is entirely perfect, far from it. I am even somewhat inclined to think that this measure contains perhaps a political purpose much more than a real willingness to promote bilingualism.

Since we have to pass judgment on the measure now before us, I should like to speak as a reasonable and tolerant man, with the hope that the few words I will say will help to make our views better understood.

This measure is not perfect, Mr. Speaker, and one only has to consider the 41 amendments already before the house to realize it.

One might believe it was drafted hastily, without due consideration. That is what prompted me to say at the outset that there was probably a great deal of politics in this issue.

One must remember, Mr. Speaker, that the purpose of this bill is to provide equality of status and rights to both languages in government services.

All those who have at least a little common sense will admit it is high time we considered this measure, because what it tends to correct is the source of misunderstandings and of various forms of unrest that we encounter every day.

Mr. Speaker, like many others I do realize that this bill will be extremely difficult to administer.