

Official Languages

By their contributions they have enriched, deepened and diversified the cultures of this nation.

● (1550)

And I saw a Canada—and this has been my life's work—which would bring an end to the division of this nation on the basis of origins, while maintaining the basic principle of confederation, an end to hyphenated Canadianism where each of us would take up the racial origin of our respective made forebears, with the rights of French Canada maintained inviolate as they were provided for in the British North America Act. Such a Canada I said was destined to play an ever greater and beneficent role in the world as an example of cultures and peoples residing together in unity.

Sir, I have been in a minority before. I was in a minority at the convention of the National Conservative Party. I had no idea of standing for the leadership. None. But I warned the Conservative party then that the idea of *deux nations*—two nations—was, as a policy, the negation of everything for which Macdonald and each succeeding prime minister from the Conservative party had stood. They said I was wrong. I need not go into detail concerning what happened. This party could not survive on the basis of a policy like that. Yet it was passed by the sub-committee of the party and by the committee on policy. I dared to speak. Having spoken, the next morning I had to allow my name to be put in nomination because of the fact that nominations had to be in by ten a.m. Otherwise, people would have said: He voices his opinions but he dare not stand.

French Canada? Well, I have always had a wonderful welcome there. In my own province, those of French origin voted for me. They voted for me when it was most unpopular for anyone to do so. They did it because I stood for their rights; I stood for their constitutional rights when it was unpopular to do so. Members opposite say: We are going to get support in Quebec, if we propose this. Mr. Speaker, the Quebec people are no different from others in every part of Canada in this respect: they are not deluded by soft-spoken, soporific phraseology.

When I was leader of this party we secured support in Quebec. Let me point this out, because it is sometimes forgotten. In 1940, with an outstanding leader in French-Canadian life, Dr. Mannion, we elected not one in Quebec though we did elect one independent. Then, John Bracken became leader of this party. He had, in Manitoba, supported Canadians of French origin over the school question of 1896, and they stood with him. In 1945, we elected one member. Then Mr. Drew came in. He had strong claims in French Canada, and he elected two. And in 1953, we in this party elected four. They tell me I know nothing about the feeling of French Canada. That may be so, but at the worst of times, when I was leader, we in this party elected more than three leaders had done in four successive election campaigns. And when I go to Montreal, when I go to Quebec, the welcome I receive today is as heartfelt as anyone could wish.

I am sorry I have never been able to learn the French language so as to make a speech in French. I have read Racine, Molière and Corneille. And I read French today with almost the same facility as I read English. But I do

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

not have an ear for sound. I am not like the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield)—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker:—who has a capacity of intonation which I lack. But I would remind you, Mr. Speaker, that the Right Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King, who was my member for years, only made two speeches in French in his entire life. Once he said "Oui", and the second time he said "Oui, oui."

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Diefenbaker: But he swept the Province of Quebec.

What did we do during my time as leader? The first thing I said we should do was to make the House of Commons bilingual. And we brought in simultaneous translation. Next, I got in touch with the administrative departments of government and pointed out that French Canada was not receiving its fair share of the upper echelon appointments. In the Department of External Affairs it was preposterous the degree to which these people did not get any kind of reasonable support when it came to appointments. It was upon my recommendation, and no one else's, that for the first time in history, the first time since Vaudreuil, one of French origin became the Governor General of Canada. The Queen accepted that recommendation. And it was in my time that bilingual cheques and the like were brought in.

This was a matter which was deeply in the hearts and minds of Canadians of French origin. So don't tell me I know nothing about the requirements of French Canada. You cannot fool the people in the Province of Quebec by taking up the position: the government brings something in and we are for it, and therefore we will get support. Nobody ever got support by tying themselves to the tail of a comet—and I think the description "comet" just fits the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). He flashed, and he is gradually disappearing.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Diefenbaker: Why was this motion brought up? The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) is a man of whom I have always spoken in the warmest terms. I don't think he has always reciprocated. I seem to remember a campaign in which caricatures of me—and I caricature well—were exhibited. But I do not mind attacks in politics as long as they are not against integrity. I listened to him today with the same interest as I always do. He did not tell the House why it is that at a time when critical national issues confront us, parliament is being asked by the Prime Minister to masticate material already digested.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1600)

Mr. Diefenbaker: Is this resolution before the House to bring about Canadian unity?

Some hon. Members: Yes.

Some hon. Members: No.