

The Constitution

and linguistic integrity of both founding peoples of Canada. However, this responsibility does not belong only to the federal government. The provincial governments, which have exclusive jurisdiction in matters of education, must also take their own responsibilities to attain this object. Section 133 of the British North America Act already states that Quebec and Manitoba must provide legislative and legal services to their minorities in their own language. More recently, Mr. Speaker, in a gesture of great wisdom and openness of mind, the premier of New Brunswick also accepted that these provisions apply to his own province. In fact, his proposal was agreed to unanimously last week by the legislature of his province.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I must publicly state my deep disappointment at the obstinate refusal of the Ontario government to follow the example of New Brunswick. Some will say that extending the provisions of Section 133 to Ontario would only be a symbolic gesture without any real meaning. In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, this argument is only a red herring which does not succeed in hiding an unwillingness which greatly exceeds the strategic framework of the recent election campaign in that province. And when it is argued that this would result in an anti-French backlash in Ontario, I can only reply that the refusal of the Ontario government is conversely creating in Quebec an even greater anti-English backlash which is even more dangerous as it is only promoting the cause of the independentist separatist movement in Quebec.

Yet the Ontario government has not lacked opportunities to show its good will. Already in 1969, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism recommended that New Brunswick and Ontario take the initiative in recognizing English and French as official languages and in accepting the linguistic implications of such recognition. Again, in 1972, the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution expressed this wish once again by making it clear that people should be able to use both official languages in the legislatures and in the courts. More recently, at the first ministers' conference last September, Ontario had another opportunity to show its concern concretely for the 500,000 francophones living in that province.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, it is not for lack of opportunities that the Ontario government has not introduced bilingualism on an institutional basis; yet, each time, it failed miserably. Today, Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my hon. colleagues from Ontario, as well as hon. members of the official opposition to avail themselves of all possible means at their disposal to try and persuade the Ontario Premier of the urgency to enshrine the linguistic rights of the Francophones of his province in our new Constitution. Over half a million of them hope to see their government move in that direction, while five million French-speaking Quebecers are monitoring the situation very closely. It is in this sense, Mr. Speaker, that a commitment from the Ontario government to apply to its province the provisions of Section 133 would be interpreted as

much more than a token gesture; it would be regarded as a concrete demonstration of national unity, an irrefutable proof for all Canadians to see that harmony between our two main linguistic groups in Canada is more than a worthy goal, a tangible reality.

This proposed Constitution now being debated is to be regarded as the foundations of the Canadian society of tomorrow, a society based on equity, freedom and tolerance, on the respect of minorities which make up the Canadian mosaic, where the basic rights of individuals would be enshrined in a wholly Canadian Constitution. We must carry through this great project together, Mr. Speaker, for the sake of our own generation and of a great many others to follow. We must also carry it through as an example for all the countries which are seeking justice and freedom.

I should like to conclude my remarks with this statement which was made by the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in Brandon, Manitoba, on February 4, and I quote:

Our Charter is not only a Canadian accomplishment, it is also a victory for the human spirit.

It is with this in mind that I have always publicly endorsed the proposed patriation of our Constitution. Although I am once more deeply disappointed by the failure of the official opposition to press the Ontario government into giving official status to the French language both within its legislative assembly and its courts, I remain nevertheless firmly supportive of the government's initiative. This initiative is, in my opinion, the first step towards a better Canada, Mr. Speaker, and it is important that we take it together.

● (1540)

[English]

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, before beginning my remarks in this very important debate, I want to pay tribute, as others have done, to the members of both Houses of Parliament who have worked so hard, not only in the special committee but in other deliberations surrounding this important matter.

Surely the object of constitutional reform has got to be unity, to unite Canadians in a renewed, reinvigorated federalism, flourishing under a revised Constitution of which all of us can be proud. Unfortunately, as the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) conceded, this debate has in fact divided our country. The reasons, in my opinion, are clear. They are based on past mistrust of the Prime Minister and his administration and the obsession that he has demonstrated in the past to push his own concepts of confederation over and around other partners in our country.

The early use of closure in this House and the continuing threat throughout this debate to use it again is a matter that has caused great resentment in this House of Commons and, I think, justifiably so. The poet James Russell Lowell once expressed the feelings of many of us when he described a man who was willing to sink half his present repute for the freedom