

*Official Languages*

Manitobans. The press release issued that day, following our meeting, announced, and I quote:

All Members of the Federal Progressive Conservative caucus renewed their support for the position announced by Mr. Mulroney. That support remains unchanged and continues to reflect the position of Mr. Mulroney and all his caucus colleagues on this subject.

[*English*]

We are all children of our environment, the sum total of our human experiences. I learned years ago that a Manitoban, indeed most westerners, does not perceive the Canadian duality and the importance of its linguistic application with the same degree of immediacy as someone whose roots are in the east. In eastern Canada from the very beginning, the French-English alliance, uneasy though it has been, became a daily reality. The sheer impact of numbers and the consequent political influence have ensured that it be so. Millions of French Canadians could not be ignored, nor could their rights be set aside. Accordingly, we have witnessed the slow but certain evolution of the protection of French language rights and others over the decades. Perfect equality has not been attained everywhere, but the evolutionary process, deeply rooted in reality and the doctrine of fairness, is irreversible in the east of this country.

● (1220)

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

**Mr. Mulroney:** I acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that the view in some areas of western Canada is different. It is neither pernicious nor benighted. It is simply different. It is different because the evolution of western Canada did not in some very important respects parallel the evolution in the east.

Vast waves of courageous immigrants from the Ukraine, Central Europe and elsewhere arrived to cause the Prairies to blossom and grow. Their sense of sacrifice and their unremitting commitment to the soil gave life to western Canada. Though different in background, they found in western Canada common ground in language. English became the quasi-universal instrument of communication. In many ways, in many important ways it became a unifying force among people of remarkably diverse backgrounds.

That precious and fragile dimension of linguistic duality which Macdonald and Cartier saw as an indispensable characteristic of nationhood was submerged by growing demographic realities of the new west. The country grew; the English language became more dominant and ultimately more pervasive. This was the silent and the inexorable toll of history. In my judgment, it emerged less through contrivance than through the irresistible effect of overwhelming numbers. Large groups of Germans, Ukrainians, Poles, Swedes and Icelanders have made the Prairies home.

But what of the small group of Franco-Manitobans who were there at the beginning as one of the founding partners of the dual linguistic dimension of Canada? They were there with rights and obligations, establishing the unique beachhead for Canada. They would later be joined by so many others of whom I have spoken who opted for the English-speaking side

of our unique dual dimension. But the linguistic rights of Franco-Manitobans were not submerged. They were removed. They were removed by a wilful act of the legislature in violation of a historic understanding. Today, Mr. Speaker, we ask simply that these rights be returned.

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

**Mr. Mulroney:** I think in some way, I hope in some important way, I understand the feeling of large groups of Manitobans who believe that their languages brought from the old country deserve a place no less prominent than the French language, which is used by relatively few Manitobans. But those few—those courageous few—who have kept the French language and culture alive in Manitoba deserve today the gratitude and not the harassment of their fellow citizens.

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

**Mr. Mulroney:** Because they have ensured through decades of anguish that, in some modest way, the unique and priceless vision of our founding fathers has persevered. To the dismay of some and the chagrin of others, but I suspect to the pride of most, they have made it possible for Canada to affirm today that French Canadians need not be locked into an enclave in one province; and they have made it possible for us to say as a nation that there are other ways, because not only there can the rights of French Canadians be protected to the exclusion of other areas in Canada. They have made it possible for Canada and millions of French Canadians to reject the ultimate siren call of separation based on language. They have made it possible for Canadians in a very certain way, and in particular for growing, overwhelming numbers of young Canadians, the hope of the future, to say of our unusual and imperfect land: this is the kind of tolerant and generous country I want to preserve for future generations.

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

**Mr. Mulroney:** So, Mr. Speaker, today my thoughts are with that small group of people in Manitoba, isolated from Quebec and New Brunswick and Ontario where millions of their fellow French Canadians live in increasingly beneficial, cultural, linguistic and economic surroundings. I think of them and I salute them for their dignity and their courage. On behalf of my Party today, I feel genuinely honoured to assist in a process that begins to repair a grievance and historic wrong.

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

**Mr. Mulroney:** I think as well of the other Manitobans whose vision of Canada, formed and shaped in circumstances different from mine, might make it difficult for them to understand or accept what I have said. I say to them how deeply I regret the unsettling events of the last few months. Although we have disagreed on this fundamental issue, I know that Manitobans have been motivated by a different historical perspective of our nation and not by a sense of malice.

I invite Manitobans, all Manitobans, as Canadians, to bind up the wounds and to deal promptly with the question of