

*Official Languages*

We, French Canadians from Quebec, contrary to some people in Western Canada, have adopted this bilingual posture. And as the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette) pointed out last week, when an English-speaking Canadian wants to be served in his own language while visiting "La belle Province", Quebecers go out of their way to please him.

However, that makes me ask myself the following question, because we have tried to show such good will in endeavouring to become bilingual, holding that in the remainder of this country, other Canadians were imitating the stand we had taken, but unfortunately we have found out that such was not the case everywhere. That is why today I wonder whether it would not have been better to preserve our French, even if we had had to hire interpreters to make ourselves understood by the remainder of Canada, for every day, I realize that we have still a lot to learn of our own language and of our French culture, and that it may be dangerous to become a people of translators rather than Canadians with a French culture and Canadians with an English culture, communicating through translators, in order to become fully aware that basically we have two cultures.

• (5:10 p.m.)

At any rate, I want to analyse the problem from an entirely new point of view, that is considering bilingualism throughout the world, and I think the best way to understand a problem is to consider it under a new angle.

When we, Canadians, have to face some national problems, we tend to withdraw into ourselves. If we look around us, we merely note what is happening in England, in France or in the United States.

These traditional sources of inspiration can hardly inform us on bilingualism. Besides, professor Mackey suggests to take the whole world as the frame-work for our analysis. If we follow this wise piece of advice, very soon we will realize that most of the people of the world, at some time or another in their history, had to face the same problems which now concern Canada and several other countries.

Bilingualism has almost always been considered as a marginal phenomenon. It has never been the prime purpose of specialized sciences such as sociology, psychology and linguistics. In the mind of the general public, bilingualism has always been rather an

exceptional, if not abnormal, phenomenon concerning only a few bilingual countries in the world or a few individuals in a community.

Therefore, I shall attempt to prove that bilingualism, far from being an exceptional problem, reserved to bilingual countries, is in fact common to most of the people of the world. Indeed, there are fewer bilingual people in bilingual countries than in so-called unilingual countries. In fact, we do not always realize that bilingualism is recognized in some nations, not so much to promote it than to provide for the maintenance and the use of two languages or more, in one nation.

A bilingual statute, for instance, ensures the integrity of the Swedish community in Finland and protects that of the Lapps in Norway.

In a federal state, such as Switzerland or Yugoslavia, official bilingualism maintains the linguistic status quo.

In the new African states, it allows the contribution of international knowledge and thus becomes a means of communication at world level.

Bilingualism is maintained by two unilingual blocks. If one of the two becomes bilingual the other one enjoys a linguistic superiority and can then absorb the bilingual community. Such has been, in the past, the fate of several bilingual communities. That is why bilingual nations consider regional unilingualism as a means of preserving their national bilingualism.

Four factors contribute to make bilingualism a universal fact. These four factors are the following: first the number and distribution of languages in the world, secondly, the comparative utility of national idioms; third, the scope of the international languages; and fourth, the migration of populations.

In the first place, Mr. Speaker we have the question of the number and distribution of languages. If we look at the situation in the right perspective, we find that there are about 30 times as many languages as countries to house them. This means that a number of countries have more than one language and if we observe the distribution of those languages we can see that this is practically the case for most countries.

There are, for instance, about 200 languages spoken in the U.S.S.R. though only 70 of them are official languages.