

Official Languages

Why is there a need for two official languages? I believe we have to deal with the political fact that the territorial and geographical unity of the country demands it. It happens to be a fact that 80 per cent of those in the province of Quebec are French speaking and that 80 per cent of those speaking French in this country live in Quebec. The younger generation in that province is deciding today and tomorrow whether to opt for Canada or to opt for Quebec. We believe the young people of Quebec will opt for Canada given the principle of equal access in the French language to the federal institutions, in Quebec, yes, and across Canada. I believe this step will represent a clear indication to French speaking Canadians in this country that they are welcome not only in Quebec or in parts adjacent to Quebec but everywhere in this country. I believe this is fundamental to national unity in Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

● (4:10 p.m.)

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): The 1967 Confederation For Tomorrow Conference accepted this principle of linguistic equality and in doing so the premiers were reflecting, I believe, public opinion to a great extent. The need for an official languages act was one of the main conclusions of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. We endorsed it in our election campaign, and I say that to make it clear that the Prime Minister of the country and members of this party were absolutely clear and as specific as they could be in either language across Canada that there was a need for this bill. We spoke of the need for this bill and we said this bill would have to be implemented to assure us national unity. This bill is a reflection of the mandate we believe we have from the people of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): As I said before, I believe the principle of linguistic equality is accepted by the majority of Canadians. Even more, I believe this principle is accepted by an overwhelming majority of young, English speaking Canadians in this country.

Mr. Lewis: That is what I said.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): If there is any evidence of a generation gap in Canada that evidence will be found, as one travels across this land from east to west or from

north to south, in the different attitudes of the generations and in the willingness with which the young will accept change for the benefit of national unity in this country. If there is any evidence of that gap it will be found in the fact that the young people of this country are willing and anxious to accept this change because they believe that having two languages gives us an identity that separates us on the northern half of the North American continent from our great neighbour to the south.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Our young people believe that having these two languages in this country makes us more civilized human beings and opens up new vistas to knowledge and new avenues of personal fulfilment. They feel that if we can arrange within the fabric of this country for both languages and linguistic groups to get along together we shall set an example to the world of how two different peoples can get along.

I believe that, Mr. Speaker, and I believe the languages bill is the core of our guarantee of equal rights and privileges for the two main linguistic groups in Canada. I do not believe it will immediately resolve all our problems—no. I do not believe it will dissipate all misunderstandings. I believe we shall have to introduce a new dynamic note into our lives. I should like to quote the words of Justice Learned Hand of the United States Supreme Court. He once remarked:

Liberty must reside in the hearts of men. Where it so lies it needs no government, no law and no court to save it, and where it is found wanting, no government, no law and no court can preserve it.

I believe that Canadians must incorporate in their lives this essential concept of our national unity. That concept is that citizens who speak either of our languages shall be free to live and grow and work in the language of their choice. That, sir, must be our national and emotional commitment.

I wish now to refer to what one of the greatest Canadians and certainly one of the greatest Prime Ministers had to say in parliament in 1890. Of course I speak of Laurier. He said:

[*Translation*]

Any policy which does not appeal to the soundest instincts of every class, of every creed, of every race, is branded with the stigma of mediocrity. The French Canadian who encourages his fellow-countrymen to