

At this time in our history we should not forget the philosopher who once said that you judge a society by how the society treats its minorities. We must judge our country by how generous we are to our minorities.

We cheer at the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. We cheer Mr. Gorbachev, and yesterday we all cheered when the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics stood up here in the gallery. We cheer the Soviets for opening up their society. We encourage them to have more human rights. We pull for the openness in their society and the democratization of their society. We cheer Nelson Mandela being released from jail in South Africa, and we hope that the minorities, in that case the majority, will be treated more fairly and more justly. However, it strikes me as very strange that there is still in this country a small number—and I stress a small number—of very narrow-minded Canadians who want to turn back the clock and deny minority rights to English-speaking minorities in Quebec or French-speaking minorities outside the Province of Quebec.

I want to close by expressing a worry and a concern. I have watched what has happened in this country over the last number of years. I know an important part of the agenda of the Prime Minister has been what he calls national reconciliation. We all want national reconciliation. We all want unity in this country. But as I travel across it and as I travel in Quebec and outside of Quebec, I sense that more and more Canadians are starting to give up. I sense in Quebec a bit more of a drift to Quebecers going on their own, to doing things their own way. There is a feeling in Quebec among more and more people that English Canada does not really care, and if English Canada does not really care, let us, Quebecers, start doing more things in our province in our own way and assert more and more sovereignty right here in Quebec. Outside of Quebec, we have seen in places like Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay the exact opposite reaction where people are saying, let them speak French in Quebec and we will speak English here. We will start going our own way as well.

I really fear that in some ways maybe the country is beginning to slip away. That is why it is so important that we not play politics with this issue. That is why it is so important that the three national political parties remain firmly and solidly united in terms of promoting duality in this country and recognizing the fact that we do have two official languages, that we stand up for minority linguistic rights, we stand up for fairness, we stand up for

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justice, we stand up for the multicultural diversity of our country, and we stand up for the native people of our country as well. I think that is very, very important.

We adopted the Official Languages Act in 1968. We had amendments to it in 1988. We had the patriation of the Constitution in 1981–1982. We are now seeing an attempt to amend the Constitution in 1987 in terms of the Meech Lake Accord.

I hope all of these these will unite us, that all of these things will bring us together and help make this country a stronger, more fair, and more positive place in which to live.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, we have a great country. I am proud to come from Western Canada. I am proud to say that nearly 30 per cent of my countrymen speak French. I am very proud of that. That is something which makes Canada different from the United States. It makes Canada a country unique in the world, Mr. Speaker. I know that most of the people in Western Canada support the Canadian duality. They agree with Quebec being a distinct society. Most Canadians accept the five pre-conditions which Quebec insisted on during the constitutional debate a couple of years ago.

Mr. Speaker, it is such a positive element. As a representative of Western Canada, I am proud to see French immersion schools everywhere. I know that even in Calgary and Edmonton, a great many parents register their children with French immersion schools because they realize how important it is for their children to be able to speak both languages. That is something very positive.

[English]

It is important that we reaffirm once again that not only do we want to protect duality in this country, we want to preserve duality and we want to promote linguistic duality in this country. In doing so, we promote Canada. We stand up for Canada and make this country a much fairer and richer place in which to live. Let us celebrate that fact. Let us be proud of that fact. In showing generosity to our linguistic minorities, we show generosity as well to our native Indian people and generosity to people who come from many other lands and cultures. With that, hopefully, we can build a much more united, strong and prosperous country in the years that lie ahead.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!