

[English]

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to say a few words in the other official language of my country and tell my colleagues that although I come from a region where the population speaks practically only French, I am pleased to assure each of you here that you will always be welcome in my region. It is a beautiful region and you will certainly enjoy your visit to my riding.

On the other hand, I hope, as a French speaking Canadian, that we will also always be accepted by others in the rest of Canada, and that the long battle fought for the recognition of our rights in this country will finally come to an end for the good of all of us as Canadians.

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

**Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to join my colleagues in congratulating you and your colleague on being chosen to the high office of Deputy Speaker and Speaker, very difficult and most respected offices. I congratulate you, and may the Great Spirit guide you in your work.

• (1720)

Before I begin my comments on the Speech from the Throne I should like to give you a little of the background of my family. My purpose is not so much to brag, but to give credibility to what I have to say here today and to what I will be saying here in the future.

My grandfather on my mother's side was a famous Shandalar Indian from Arctic Village. When he was a little boy there were no white people in his part of the country. He was a peacemaker with the people during the surveying of the boundary lines between Alaska, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. That was in the very early part of this century. He was born about 1850.

My grandfather on my father's side was a Scotsman from the Orkney Islands. He worked for 52 years as a chief factor for the Hudson's Bay Company in the Mackenzie district, in the Peel River country. He also was a peacemaker between the Indian, the Eskimo and the white man. Both of my grandfathers were very good friends and they did much for this country in the early times. My grandfather, John Firth, financed Vilhjalmur Steffanson's first expedition in exploring the High Arctic. He was also one of the first J.P.'s and honorary constable to work in the Peel River country. I hold up these handcuffs to show you Mr. Speaker. They were his, but he never once had to use them because he had the respect of the people, the Indian, the Eskimo and the white man.

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

**Mr. Firth:** Up in that part of the country my paternal grandfather John Firth, and my maternal grandfather Dinji Cho, were big men for many years. They died only about 25 or 30 years ago. I think they did very valuable work for the good of Canada and for the good of mankind in that part of the country. As a Member of Parliament representing the Northwest Territories and representing the native peoples of that part of the country, I will try to do my best to work for mankind and for Canada.

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

*The Address—Mr. Firth*

**Mr. Firth:** I stand here very proudly as a Métis and representing the largest constituency in Canada. And, if I am not mistaken, I believe I may be representing the largest electoral constituency in all the world. I speak of course of the Northwest Territories which has an area of 1.3 million square miles. Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that any government in any other part of the world would allow such a stupid situation to exist.

The Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien) and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) have travelled parts of my country, and they can vouch for what I have to say in that respect. It is an almost physical impossibility for one man to give good representation to that very important part of Canada. You must take into consideration not only the vastness of the land, the harshness of the climate, the difficulty of travel up there, and the extreme high cost of travel, but also the lack of a good communications network, and the fact that there is not only a diversity of languages but also great differences between east and west in the Northwest Territories. I mean cultural differences.

As I say, there are several languages spoken in that part of the world, and today there is still a very high rate of illiteracy. I was indeed most disappointed not to learn from the Speech from the Throne that that situation would be changed. Another omission in the Speech from the Throne that I was not very happy about was that the Inuit, the Indian and the Métis people, the very first citizens of this land were not even mentioned.

In my constituency approximately two-thirds of the population are people of native ancestry. They were at one time some of the richest people in this land. Today they are some of the very poorest people in this land. This is especially so in terms of very bad and dangerous housing conditions, the extreme shortage of housing, and the lack of good community services. As long as this situation continues to exist with the very first citizens of this land being the very poorest in their homeland, I fail to understand how one in this country can say, "I am proud to be a Canadian." That is a disgrace to this nation. That is the truth, and I am sure you all know it. I would suggest that it is especially a disgrace when this country can spend millions of dollars for a pie in the sky, or for something better known as Anik.

If the present trend continues, as it now seems likely it will, with the government and large companies in the south continuing their exploitation of the beautiful north, and with the south trying to make the north into something like the south, with big ugly cities, and all the pollution and other things that go along with civilization, without the people of the north having any meaningful say in the whole matter, then I am sure this country will be in great trouble.

A few months ago Reverend Father Adams of Inuvik, who spent 30 years up in that part of the world, who learned the language of the people and who lived with them, mentioned that if oil and gas lines are built in the north, particularly in the Mackenzie corridor of the Northwest Territories, there was a danger some people up there just might blow up the pipelines, particularly if those people did not derive any long-term benefits from them. I