

*The Constitution*

something different. It offered them unlimited opportunity and it offered them freedom—freedom to follow their own dreams and to pursue their own interests.

I grew up in an ethnic environment. I can tell you there always existed a great pride in being a Canadian. Ethnic communities across this land are very conscious of their responsibility to the country which has given them so much. They first and foremost are good Canadians.

Every member who has taken his place in this House of Commons has, I am sure, at one time or another been present at a citizenship ceremony when new Canadians were sworn in. Everyone has seen the shine in their eyes. It is a genuine pride. They are proud to be Canadians, and we were proud as children to be Canadians. They are proud despite the acts of discrimination against many ethnic groups in Canada during the war. Indeed, the Canadian record is not without blemish. Most of us in this House have been made very much aware of what happened to the Japanese in Canada. I should like to tell you something of what happened to people of Italian, Finnish and to some degree German parentage in Canada during the war.

Italian parents of my friends suffered greatly, and they suffered unjustly. Though Canadian citizens with two sons fighting for Canada overseas, these people were marched off to be fingerprinted and their guns confiscated. We were all aware of other injustices against other ethnic groups. As a matter of fact, it happened within the church of my community. Despite it, ethnic communities across this country have persevered. Life goes on and injustice can be corrected.

I remember my parents and grandparents, Finnish born, speaking about the promise of Canada, of the history and especially the future of Canada. I think you will find that across this nation the ethnic communities are in general more tolerant and more sympathetic than any other group on the issue of linguistic rights. They themselves speak a second language in most cases, be it German, Finnish, Japanese, Ukrainian, Croatian, what have you. They appreciate the benefit that a second language can provide. It is an asset, an opportunity, a means through which we can broaden our understanding of one another.

Certainly in northern Ontario, in Nickel Belt, the Francophone community has had to fight long and hard to enjoy linguistic equality. However, I am happy to say that the previously unsettled atmosphere has now changed in my area. Let me tell you what used to happen to the Francophone in days not so far gone by. They fought first of all to have French minority language rights in the elementary schools. That happened. At the end of grade eight, after eight years of French language instruction, these children were placed into an English milieu. What happened to them in grade nine or ten? They dropped out. It was generally accepted that they were ineducable when the fact was they had been educated for eight years in one language and were then expected to sink or swim in another language.

That was changed. Through long and bitter struggles, we developed French secondary schools in our area. I believe we

now have five. What happened to them at the end of secondary school? Did they have to go on to an English university? No. The people of northern Ontario did not tolerate that. They turned around and created a bilingual university, Laurentian University. In northern Ontario a student can go from kindergarten right through university in the French language. I am very proud to say that Laurentian University now offers a translators course which is the pride of not only northern Ontario but all of Canada.

I can also state that many of the youngsters have reversed the situation. Many of those who now attend French immersion classes share my own ethnic background, or that of other ethnic groups which help make up my riding. I might add that our courts in northern Ontario are now, for all practical purposes, bilingual. The battle was not an easy victory in northern Ontario. One of my early election promises was that I would fight to have minority language rights enshrined in the constitution.

*[Translation]*

To my constituents of Nickel Belt and French Canadians all over Canada, I proudly present this constitution, a constitution which guarantees the right to education in the language of the minority.

*[English]*

This resolution before us will enshrine in the constitution the rights to linguistic equality and educational choice where numbers merit. They will be protected forever. Linguistic rights are but a small part of this constitutional package. The renewed constitution will be the embodiment of our national purpose. It will define the basic sets of principles by which this nation will be governed in the future. It will be a symbol of the strength of Canada as one nation and the vitality of Canadian democracy.

I would like to dwell on this idea of symbols for a moment. Frankly, I think the beaver has been much maligned of late. I am very familiar with the beaver, there being many of them in my part of the country. Occasionally they are a nuisance. However, it was the only truly Canadian symbol that my mother, as an immigrant, had to offer us when I was growing up. I am rather proud of them. It will be very much easier for new immigrants who come to this country. They will have a flag and a constitution. These are not mere symbols, but real and tangible symbols.

Today we have so much more in our country, a flag, and a constitution that will be our guarantee for the people, a guarantee from their government to protect them from undue discrimination and harassment for all time. Basic human rights will be enshrined, not as mere lip service to well founded ideals but as part of the law of the land. The package of rights will have an effect that is long overdue. For example, upon the passing into law of the provisions of the proposed new Canadian constitution, injustices such as presently exist with respect to the rights of Indian women in Canada will disappear.