

*Official Languages Act*

Act, that provincial governments would follow the example of the federal government in ensuring that services would be available in French in situations where the numbers of citizens requiring such services warrant it. Provision was made in section 15 of the Official Languages Act for consultation to take place with the governments of the provinces as part of the process of determining where bilingual districts might best be established.

The philosophy of the royal commission in regard to the role of the provinces and their treatment of the minorities was indicated in the first formal report the commission issued, that is in Book I. The commission had this to say:

The principle of equality implies respect for the idea of minority status, both in the country as a whole and in each of the regions. In the provinces or smaller administrative entities both Anglophones and Francophones live in some cases as a majority and in some cases as a minority. Since the English-speaking population is larger across the country its members are less often in the minority; but they are the minority in some areas, especially in Quebec. Francophones are usually in the minority outside Quebec. In either case, however, the principle of equality requires that the minority receive generous treatment.

I think that last sentence, Mr. Speaker, is the key to what the attitude of the provinces should be. They should establish the principle of equality whereby the minority is given fair treatment.

In essence, the Official Languages Act insists that it is the right of any Canadian to be and to remain unilingual. The act, in fact, reflects the situation in our country: about 60 per cent of the French Canadians resident in Quebec are unilingual French and the vast majority of citizens resident in other provinces are unilingual English.

Despite this treatment of unilingualism as an individual civil right of Canadians, and despite the fact that members of the Conservative party voted for the Official Languages Act, the fact remains that many Canadians in western Canada have been led to believe that the act "forces French down their throats". Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I hold the members of the Progressive Conservative party responsible for this misunderstanding of the Official Languages Act.

Since it appears highly likely that there will be a general election in the near future, I would go further and challenge members of that party to finally face their political responsibilities to all the people of this country and to cease once and for all the blockage or misrepresentation of the legitimate aspirations of both French-speaking Canadians and English-speaking Canadians with respect to their opportunity to use, to work in and to learn the language of their preference.

Hon. members will be familiar with the rather infamous Bill 101 passed by the Parti Québécois government in the province of Quebec, a bill whose basis is, in the words of Dr. Camille Laurin, its author and the Quebec minister of cultural development, "ethnocentric". The effect of the bill or law is to deny French Canadians the right to choose the language of education of their choice for their children. I want to come back to that later, Mr. Speaker.

This is a matter upon which much debate has taken place, namely whether or not, in effect, there is such danger to the French language that in order to protect that language it is

[Mr. Blaker.]

now necessary, as has been done in Bill 101, to reduce the civil rights of French-speaking Quebecers by limiting their choice of language in education.

I take the view, Mr. Speaker, that every citizen of Canada and every landed immigrant should be able to choose the language in which his children should be educated, no matter where in Canada he may be resident, and based only upon the existence of a reasonable number of other people of similar intention so that there is an adequate number of children in that area to warrant an education in that language of choice.

To put the same proposition in a different manner, Mr. Speaker, it is my view that this parliament ought to ensure these rights as civil rights of Canadians by enshrining them in the BNA Act and including them in a bill of rights incorporated in that act so that they are a part of the constitution of Canada.

I take the view that one of the fundamental functions of the federal government is the just protection and encouragement of minorities of every type throughout the whole of Canada. That has been clearly stated again and again by the Liberal Party of Canada and was repeated recently by delegates to the national Liberal party convention in Ottawa. It has also been said by the leader of the Liberal party, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau).

There is, then, a very clear philosophical distinction between the position taken on these matters by the Parti Québécois government in Quebec and the Liberal Party of Canada. It is we at the federal level who seek freedom of choice. It is we who seek a nationwide opportunity for parents of any language to educate their children in their language of choice. And it is we who seek to expand the options of every Canadian and to encourage Canadians to take this choice as a personal civil right. By contrast, the official opposition, the Conservative party, seems to have a perpetual schizophrenia on this matter. They say and vote one thing in this House and they say and do the utterly contradictory thing in their home ridings and elsewhere in the country.

In my area of Quebec one of the strongest demands of citizens is that those who are English-speaking at home wish their children to acquire the other official language, French, at school. Like people all over Europe, we believe that the acquisition of a second, and indeed third or fourth, language is a matter of pride and delight, not a distasteful obligation but a wonderful opportunity.

Francophones and non-Francophones alike in Quebec grow weary of the theories of ethnocentricity, of the deliberate distortion of facts and reality in the name of the protection of some linguistic rights. It is perfectly clear that in the area of Montreal there has been a loss of capital investment, lost job opportunities, jobs and businesses of all sorts, not because of friction between English and French, but because of the irrational and arbitrary discrimination practised by the government of that province.