

Official Languages

unity, they are prepared to go along with it. Even in this house I am certain that all members of all parties in their own hearts and in their own way desperately want this Canada of ours to remain a single unit. I have no quarrel with those who feel that this legislation is bad and might do more harm than good. That is the view they hold. We might quarrel over the direction to follow and the method of attaining national unity and of holding the various provinces of Canada together, but I know of no member of the house who really desires to see Canada split in two. I am convinced that the vast majority of Canadians in every province also wishes to see the bonds of national unity grow stronger and friendlier as the years go by.

In my opinion the official languages bill is not the most important move we can make in the lengthy process of strengthening the bonds of union within our nation. I believe it is only one of the foundation stones of Canadian unity. I trust that no one in this house or in Canada will consider that national unity has been achieved merely by the passage of this piece of legislation. Much more remains to be done if we are really to put Canadian unity on a solid foundation.

The government of the day has the political power to initiate those moves which will do as much or more for Canadian unity than even the present piece of legislation. I am referring to those grave and continuing social and economic problems which haunt a large section of Canadian society today. These pressing economic and social problems can do vast harm to Canadian unity unless they are dealt with quickly and effectively. In every section of Canada we find these economic problems hanging like millstones around the necks of governments and individuals alike. Any benefit gained from the passage of the official languages bill could be quickly lost if these unsolved economic problems were used as a lever by some unscrupulous politicians to try to separate some of the ethnic groups in our society from Canada.

Today we see most sections of Canada facing serious economic problems, and to me the alarming thing is that this government has done so little about it. I would like to mention briefly some of the problems, such as unemployment where we have a promise of action but no clearcut plan. The tragic housing situation, especially in the larger urban centres—its solution could go a long way toward solving the problem of national unity in this nation—can never be tackled by the anaemic

legislation proposed by the present administration. The sharp increases in the cost of living, with their resulting erosion of the living standards of people on small pensions and low incomes, is just another example of inaction in a vital area. The poverty and insecurity of millions of Canadians, as outlined in the fifth report of the Economic Council of Canada, is another indication of lack of action by the present administration. These are a number of other fields where neglect by governments past and present is obvious. Our pollution problems, the heavy taxation loads on those who can least afford them, and the need for urgent pension reform are other areas which should be looked into immediately.

One thing of which I am sure is that all the points I have mentioned briefly, together with the official languages bill, add up to national unity. I believe it is safe to say that a contented, happy group of people, regardless of their ethnic background, with adequate living standards, is not apt to seek solutions to economic problems by separating from the unit which has given it these standards. This must be our objective as Canadians, and I feel that the time is too short for politicians to delay further the solutions to many of the grave economic problems which we all know exist and which we all know must be solved. We all know that these solutions will help to solve the problem of national unity.

● (3:10 p.m.)

I would like to say again, having in mind all the amendments which are to be made to the bill, that taking the bill as a unit I am convinced it is one step toward that great Canadian goal of keeping Canada united. Despite the many inadequacies of the measure I am prepared to support it. I trust it is just a start on the road to that real Canadian unity which the vast majority of Canadians desire and will work toward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Eymard Corbin (Madawaska-Victoria): Mr. Speaker, it is with a feeling of regret and with some bitterness that I find myself compelled to speak in this debate on second reading of the bill respecting the official languages.

With regret, I say, because, having heard and read the exaggerated comments of some of the hon. members opposite, I have told myself that there are after all some prospective separatists who are not French-speaking and who are not from Quebec.