

freedom and know how fragile it is, usually exercise great care in intervening in matters of culture even when they cannot avoid intervening in matters of language.

I believe that parliament should intervene in the language situation. Despite the lip service we have paid to it, French is not on an equal level with English. I abhor the fact that some people are refused jobs only because of their lack of English and the fact that they are French-speaking Canadians. They had a part in founding this country. By the same token, however—and here again I refer to the employment of women in the public service as an example—they do not want tokenism. They do not want somebody accepted just because he speaks French, but rather because he speaks French and he is worth his hire.

That is all that should really be said on the subject, but unfortunately it does not apply in every case. The government realizes that more has to be done along the lines of official languages. However, more than languages, what is needed is a very clear guideline for the people of Canada, particularly those whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, to assure them that we are not asking everybody to be bilingual but merely to respect both official languages. We could even drop the word "bilingual" and refer to "linguistic requirements", perhaps.

More harm has been done on this subject of discrimination, and to unity through misconception—for example, the fear of people in western Canada that they are going to have to speak French. This is not true; nobody is imposing French on them. I agree wholeheartedly with the portion of the bill that refers to the fact that provincial governments could and should do a tremendous amount more than what they are presently doing on this question of linguistic rights. In my own city of Toronto I recently saw a notice in seven different languages, one of which was English, but none of which was French. That is appalling and, worse still, that notice appeared in a school. Why can we not instil in our children the need to learn French, not the necessity, and the enrichment of knowing another language?

Keith Spicer not too long ago pointed out that English and French are the two most widely used languages in the world. You can go any place knowing both of them and somehow make your way. It is not as if it were a language like Swedish, for instance, which is concentrated in one small part of the globe. These are two international languages, yet we as Canadians are hesitant about learning both of them. I do not know why we have this shortsightedness, especially when it concerns children. However, the answer is not to stuff it down their throats as we have been accused of doing. I do believe the provinces should give guidance by influencing the thinking of the school boards and the thinking of its citizens.

Why can French not become an official language in Ontario? We are told that perhaps there is a political reason and people may rebel. I cannot think why. In Ottawa we see "Stop" and "Arrêt" on the same road sign, but in Toronto we just see "Stop". Why is that Mr. Speaker?

Official Languages Act

● (1632)

I think what is missing in this country is tolerance, understanding and compassion. Very often a feeling of fair play is also missing. When we can be big enough to understand what other people want, meaning our brothers and sisters in this country, and when we lean toward them and give them their fair share, perhaps then we will overcome the terrible difficulties we face now.

There is a price to pay, Mr. Speaker, and most of us are willing to pay it, but we want to know exactly what that price is.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rod Blaker (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my remarks with respect to Bill C-202, I wonder if I could ask other members of the House and yourself, sir, to join me in making welcome that gentleman whose presence in the gallery is extremely appropriate to a discussion of linguistic rights in Canada. I refer to Mr. Max Yalden, who is seated in the visitors' gallery. Whether his view of the complexity of the linguistic problems of our country will be improved by following this debate I do not know, but it is my intention—I almost say with the permission of the hon. member for Matane (Mr. De Bané)—to stray a little into the field of constitutional reform.

Perhaps for different reasons but with rather similar principles, I have grown exhausted over the years with the lack of movement on the matter of linguistic rights and educational linguistic rights in Canada.

As I said, I want to take some issue with the hon. member for Matane with respect to his Bill C-202—not with his purpose, which I think is admirable, and not with the effects of the bill, but rather with the mechanism that he has chosen. That is because I would prefer a mechanism that has more impact and would have longer lasting effects on Canadians. I refer to the patriation and amendment of the British North America Act as the constitution of Canada.

I think that is a long overdue event. I suggest that a long last the time has come to patriate the British North America Act, to revise it, to amend it and to provide therein a bill of rights which will guarantee the citizens of Canada, of any nationality or origin, the right to be unilingual in either of the two official languages, and the right to educate their children to be bilingual so that those children will be able to learn both official languages of Canada.

The Official Languages Act provides, in essence, that citizens of Canada should be able to address themselves to the federal institutions of Canada in the official language of their choice, whether that be English or French. In my view, Mr. Speaker, it simply provides to Canadians the right to be unilingual.

If we go back to the reports of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism which began its hearings about ten years ago, we find it was the hope of that commission, which is reflected in the wording of the Official Languages