

*Official Languages*

● (1540)

*[English]*

Many years ago, Madam Speaker, in welcoming a group of immigrants to America, one of the most outstanding jurists in that country, in that great republic, described for his audience of freshly arrived immigrants—which is not inappropriate for us because this very House of Commons reflects the fact that we are a nation of minorities, we are a nation of immigrants and should be very proud of it—

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

**Mr. Mulroney:**—what he thought was most important at that time. However, I think he also, inadvertently no doubt, described what is best in our citizenship as well. Mr. Justice Hand referred to it as the “spirit of liberty.” He told the group of immigrants that the spirit of liberty is the spirit that is not too sure that it is right. The spirit of liberty seeks to understand the minds of other men and other women. The spirit of liberty weighs their interests alongside its own without bias. The spirit of liberty knows that not even a sparrow falls to earth unheeded. The spirit of liberty, he said, is the spirit of Him, who near 2000 years ago taught mankind a lesson that it has never quite learned and never quite forgotten, that there may be a kingdom where the least shall be heard and considered side by side with the greatest. That is what this resolution is about today.

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

**Mr. Mulroney:** This resolution is about fairness. It is about decency. It is an invitation for co-operation and understanding. It speaks to the finest qualities in this nation.

I say to you on behalf of my entire Party on this or any great issue that affects this nation that we stand before you, Madam Speaker, united in the sunlight, ready to work for a better Canada.

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

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa):** Madam Speaker, in 1867 Canada was created when the rights of French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians were acknowledged. If that had not been the case there would have been no Canadian federation. These rights were originally recognized in Quebec and the Parliament of Canada, and without these crucial rights, Canada would not have continued to survive. The various crises we have experienced in the course of our history occurred largely because we failed to respect the letter and intent of this duality. Madam Speaker, history has shown that when the majority exercises its powers with tolerance and imagination, we obtain the cohesiveness that is essential to the unity of a country. On the other hand, when the majority of its leaders fails to respect this principle, conflict and injustice are the result. That is the situation we are faced with today.

*[English]*

We have to see the history of Manitoba itself in the context of this resolution. Manitoba Members who have studied the history of our country will recall that Manitoba was the first Province to join Confederation after 1867. It was not, I might underline here, the will of the Government in Ottawa that this Province should come into existence. Quite the contrary. The federal Government of the day wanted the whole of the Prairies to be ruled as a territory from Ottawa.

Manitobans felt differently. Led by Louis Riel, English and French-speaking Members of the Red River colony alike forced the federal Government by their own actions to take notice of the moral legitimacy of their claims to a government of their own.

It is this I want to emphasize today, Madam Speaker, that Manitobans set the trend for the historical development of western Canada by saying that they, indeed, should have a government of their own.

The new Province of Manitoba, established in 1870 by the Manitoba Act, reflected in law the reality of its population. By law, the English and French languages were put on an equal basis in the legislature and the courts. It was a good beginning.

*[Translation]*

Unfortunately, twenty years later, the Government of Manitoba no longer recognized those rights, the Franco-Manitobans were no longer in the majority and had become a minority group. We, the majority, must recognize these facts and the consequences resulting from the disappearance of those rights. Franco-Manitobans had become strangers in their own country. They no longer had access to public education in French. Franco-Manitoban teachers who taught the French language and culture to their pupils were threatened with dismissal. They could not be themselves in public.

*[English]*

I am pleased as a Canadian to be able to say that in recent times this sad period in our history has witnessed a new page. Modern Manitoba is in most respects a very different place indeed. Not only has there been a cultural renaissance by Franco-Manitobans with their school rights clearly established, but also the infusion of Canadians whose ancestors came from every part of the globe has made Manitoba one of the most diverse and interesting of our Provinces. The composition of modern Manitoba governments and institutions has borne witness to this change in the population. Recent court decisions have also reflected this new tolerance, this enriching openness.

● (1550)

With the Supreme Court decision of 1979 it became clear that the provincial Act of 1890 was not only morally offensive but also unconstitutional. It became clear that the rights of Franco-Manitobans must not only be restored in practice but also in law. It was in this context that the present Government of Manitoba, following in the footsteps of the Conservative Government which preceded it, began discussions with the