

Official Languages

views. I spoke, as I have said many times in this House, as a new Canadian speaking to another new Canadian. The hon. member for Selkirk is here and he will underline the fact that my answer to that person was not booed, but received a standing ovation that lasted many seconds—not for me but for the ideas I expressed.

● (2100)

During the campaign last fall I attended a meeting in Port Alberni in the constituency of my friend the hon. member for Comox-Alberni (Mr. Barnett). The same sort of question was asked, and I gave the same sort of answer. A good many people in British Columbia say that you get a lot of backlash there. I gave the same sort of answer, and again there was a standing ovation in acceptance of the ideas I expressed.

I have been on open-line programs in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia and every other province in this country. Of course, occasionally you receive a call from a person like one call I will never forget, from an obviously very elderly lady whom I am sure is the salt of the earth. I have not the faintest notion who she is, but her cracked voice indicated she was pretty elderly. She said to me; "Mr. Lewis, why do those fellows want to speak French? Why don't they speak Canadian?" That angered me. But there is that kind of person in this country; that kind of person exists not only on the Anglophone side but also on the Francophone side. One might think of the province of Quebec, and I have travelled through that province. But by and large I am confident that the Canadian people from coast to coast are ready to accept this policy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: They are ready to accept this policy particularly if all of us who are political spokesmen and political leaders have the sense and the imagination to promote the policy and not tear it down.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: I mention another experience because it moved me very much. A couple of months ago I was at a meeting at the University of Western Ontario, London. The hon. member for that constituency may know of that meeting. It was a special meeting started as a counter-convention but which ended in a very positive Canadian meeting. There was a large audience of well over 2,000 students, not only from the university but from the high schools. The reason I am mentioning this is that London, Ontario, is not in the centre of a large French-speaking community.

An hon. Member: Would you believe!

Mr. Lewis: With great respect to the citizens of London, whom I love, particularly when they vote NDP—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Which is rare.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Who were those three?

[Mr. Lewis.]

Mr. Lewis: I thought I had become a little too serious and a bit of levity was called for. With great respect to the citizens of London, that city does not have the reputation of being a revolutionary centre of modern ideas. The important thing about that meeting was that its chairman, a young student at the university, started to speak French. The person who introduced me made his speech half in English and half in French. The person who introduced the other speaker, who happened to be Pierre Berton, spoke half in English and half in French. After the meeting we had a little get-together and I asked these three people why this was done. This is the important part. I asked, "Why did you speak French?" They spoke fairly well in French. The answer was, "We were discussing the independence of Canada, the building of a distinct society, and we could not discuss it only in one of its languages".

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: I say that the people of Canada, particularly the young people, are ready to accept this kind of policy, to stand behind it and to remove all the prejudices which have plagued some of us older Canadians. There are some people who, because they believe that the steps are too slow, say that the resolution is a retreat from the original idea. It is not. What happened, and I am not going to put it the same way as the Leader of the Opposition, nor am I going to put it any better, is that the implementation of the policy in the public service in the first two or three years raised a great many unnecessary fears and a great deal of unnecessary opposition inside the public service.

I am not going to read what I said because it is not as worthy of reading as the quotation used by the Leader of the Opposition, but during the debate on the Official Languages Act I underlined the need for openness in the implementation of the policy and for making sure it was based on consent and did not appear to the people to be imposed from the top. On rereading the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition and my own remarks—I reread them just today; that is why I remember them—I pleaded with the government to consult the unions of the public servants about the implementation of that policy, because that was not done early enough and a great deal of unnecessary misunderstanding and bitterness was created.

I am glad to see, as I was last November or December, that the resolution now contains safeguards which the policy should have contained before. The resolution does not now indicate that the unilingual public servant who has been in the service for some time will suffer as a result of the new policies now being introduced. Let me quote only one sentence of what I said on May 16, 1969:

I say, Mr. Speaker, that we must make sure that one injustice is not replaced by another.

That is what appeared to some people to be happening and I am glad the resolution now precludes such a thing from happening. I am not going to take the time to explain how the resolution has answered some of the criticism that some people, including myself, have sometimes expressed, but at a nomination convention for Pauline Jewett here in Ottawa certain things were mentioned. Perhaps I should not take the time to repeat them.

Mr. Pelletier (Hochelaga): Take the time; you should.