

The Constitution

Olivar Asselin, and others, were created to strengthen the French language and culture in Ontario.

I had myself the privilege of taking an active part in French Canadian activities in Toronto. First, when I was admitted to the Bar, I sat on the advisory committee for French language education when the Étienne Brûlé secondary school was established in Toronto. It is hard to imagine that in a city of two million people where there were more than 60,000 French Canadians, we tried for four years to get a French secondary school. Four years, Mr. Speaker! I was there myself only for the last three years, and we were told that we would be unable to get 200 students in our school. Of course, we now have that school and even more because the need has been recognized, but there was already virtually systematic resistance at that time. However, this was in a city where people said: nearly all of the residents of Toronto are English Canadians! There are no French Canadians. Of course, that was not true. But in other Ontario areas where we had a French majority, we had to extract, to tear out French schools from the public administration, as well as we could. I have children, Mr. Speaker, I was fortunate. In fact, I went to an English language public school, but after that I went to Ottawa University and perfected my French.

My younger brother went through all his classes in French schools in Ontario, and is quite happy about it. I would like my children, whom I dragged along into western Canada this summer, could also have mobility, be able to go to western Canada and live as they live at home, as I lived in Sturgeon Falls, as my grandparents lived in Hull and Glengarry-Prescott. This is not asking very much. I was brought up with a concept of Canada under which I had as much place as a Francophone as any Anglophone anywhere across the land, and I am not prepared to accept anything less. I am not being selfish, because my presence is a contribution to the country. I am not talking of my own self of course, but rather the presence of French civilization that contributes to this whole country we call Canada.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, to people who may oppose this I would suggest I never forced anyone to speak French. If people want to speak to me in French, they are welcome to do so. But I recognize realities. Being Franco-Ontarian, I recognize I had to learn English. And I had no fear in doing so, because I feel it is an advantage to speak the two most used languages in the civilized world. I have absolutely no concern about this, and I worked hard to learn English. I am not ashamed of it, no more than I am ashamed of speaking French and trying to do so with all the concentration, vigour and imagination I am capable of. Mr. Speaker, this is the nature of this country.

The hon. member for Nepean-Carleton referred earlier to the problem in this country, because of the vastness of our regions like the west, for anybody to understand all that. This is a truism.

● (2050)

[English]

Nobody, but nobody, can deny that this country has been enriched by a vast array of human beings who brought their immeasurable wealth to our shores. Every time I attend a citizenship acceptance ceremony I am impressed. The judge always identifies the number of countries that are represented by the new citizens and, on every occasion, I tell them that this is a brand new country in the full process of evolution and development with the strongest potential of any country in the world.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blais: I say to hon. members opposite that there is no divisiveness in what we are attempting to do. The divisiveness will come from undue delay caused by the other side of the House for no reason at all. Hon. members opposite know full well that after we patriate the constitution, as we will, we will deal *seriatim* with every issue that has to be dealt with at the federal-provincial level. That is of necessity. But we will remove that very unfortunate lever which was used by the provinces, namely, the very fact of patriation, which has stopped constructive negotiation and discussion.

Constructive negotiation and discussion is essential if this country, with its unfathomable wealth, is to be able to pursue its course as a unified country and as a country which will invite to its shores people to develop its population to a level which was foreseen by our predecessors, including Sir Wilfrid Laurier, but cannot be conceived to the full extent even by ourselves as we sit here debating this essential document.

I am pleased to have participated in this debate. The details can be discussed at a later stage, and that stage has to be in committee. Let us send this resolution to committee and we will all be better for it.

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, as I stand, I am forced to admit that it is a moving experience, to stand and defend my country from internal assaults. It reminds me of when I was called upon to defend my country from external assaults. It is a very stirring and emotional experience. I would say that it is gut-gripping when so much is at stake.

The best thing I can think of to do in the circumstances is to approach the whole matter calmly and rationally and critically analyse the various proposals that are before us to decide which, if any, are acceptable and what effect each may have on the country which we in this chamber and people throughout the land hold so dear. What then are the proposals? The resolution before us has been there long enough now to allow us to stand back and look at it critically and analytically to determine what it is attempting to do and how it proposes to carry out its purposes.

It proposes to patriate what is called the constitution. I say that it proposes to patriate the BNA Act and other elements of the constitution. It proposes the entrenchment of a charter of rights and equalization principles. Finally, it proposes an