

*Official Languages***OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

RESOLUTION ON FRENCH LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN MANITOBA

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport) moved:

That:

Whereas the House, in a resolution adopted on October 6, 1983 with unanimous support from all Parties, invited the Government and Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to take action as expeditiously as possible to fulfil their constitutional obligations and to protect effectively the rights of the French-speaking minority of the province;

Whereas the House also endorsed on that occasion the essence of the agreement reached to that end on May 16, 1983 by the Government of Canada and the Government of Manitoba, with the participation of the Société Franco-Manitobaine;

Whereas the Government of Manitoba introduced in the Legislative Assembly of the province, on July 4, 1983, a constitutional resolution providing for the amendment of the *Manitoba Act, 1870* and, subsequently, amendments thereto as well as a bill respecting public services which, together, are consistent with the essence of the agreement reached on May 16, 1983 by the Government of Canada and the Government of Manitoba;

Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, after several months of debate, is being prevented from bringing the constitutional resolution to a vote, and therefore from fulfilling its constitutional obligations;

(1) the House urges the Government of Manitoba to persist in its efforts to fulfil the constitutional obligations of the province and protect effectively the rights of its French-speaking minority in a spirit of tolerance and civility, amity and generosity;

(2) the House urges the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba to consider such resolution and legislation in an urgent manner so as to ensure their timely passage.

He said: Mr. Speaker, first let me express my thanks on behalf of Members on this side and all Members of the House for having granted unanimous consent to introduce this resolution that is of such major importance both to my own province and to the country as a whole. It takes us back not that many months ago to October 6 when this Parliament, perhaps in one of its finest hours during the past several years, agreed also unanimously to a resolution urging the Manitoba Legislature to find the solution to the matter of language rights in my home province.

That was a very important moment. It was a very historic moment. This Parliament was united, speaking with one voice, marking a spirit of hope and expectation so that a major historical wrong could be put right through the actions of the elected members of the Assembly of Manitoba and ultimately this Parliament.

Unfortunately, as we viewed those hopes and expectations of October they have become something of a distant echo. All too often news reports coming from Manitoba are full of stories of paralysis, stalemate, rancor, indignation and frustration. As we all know, the legislature of that province has been unable to find the resolution to the proposals that were brought forward.

As a citizen of the Province of Manitoba, and there are other Members of this House who share that distinction, we ache with what we see in our home territory. It is difficult to witness the kind of division that takes place. It is frustrating to see the business of the province come to a halt, to be received by deadlock in the Legislative Assembly. This is preventing the business which that province desperately needs to create work

and to deal with the social problems of its citizens which cannot be seized by the Manitoba Legislature because of this overriding issue.

The business of the province has reached a stalemate, but perhaps more important is what has happened to the people. I think I speak for most Manitobans who would like to see the problem resolved. There is a great sense of willingness, I believe, to look at the record of almost 100 years and to find ways of resolving it. But for whatever the causes and for whatever the underlying reasons, that has not been the case. That is why it is so important that this House once again speak with a united and unanimous voice and reassert and reaffirm its commitments to the Constitution of Canada. Once again we must put forward our voice of reason and reasonableness to argue that we must correct a historical wrong, correct the past injustices and invite Manitobans, in fact all Canadians, to approach this matter in a state of tolerance and generosity.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Axworthy: There are some in my province who argue that this House has no business in the issue, that it is purely made in Manitoba. I think throughout the discourse and debate that has gone on there has been a degree of restraint on behalf of federal Members of Parliament and other Canadians to allow over time the efforts of that province to focus on its responsibilities. Those who say that we have no business are dead wrong. This is not a matter that can be confined or limited simply to the boundaries of Manitoba; it is an issue for all Canadians. We are going to the very heart of what this country is all about, to the very basic fundamentals of our Constitution—the fact that we are not prepared to recognize that anybody will be a stranger somewhere in this country, that there is equality of treatment. Whether it be linguistic, sexual or moral treatment, everyone must be treated equal. We must make sure that takes place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, we know it is vital for all Canadians to have the right to work, to live and travel anywhere in Canada. We know it is important to fight the separatist view that a group has to stay in a given region without having a choice in this matter. We realize the importance of protecting English and French minorities in each region.

Language rights are a fact of life in Canada and an essential part of our Federation. Therefore, we must accept official recognition of French in Manitoba.

[*English*]

There is another issue which it is important to consider, that is, what has happened in Manitoba and what statement it makes about the democratic process. One reason our resolution of October 6 was so heartily endorsed by all Members of