

Language Rights

Mr. Epp: I would suggest that it will not lead to understanding. I know that the exercise that the Hon. Member has put before us today will not lead to a solution.

I would like to tell you about something that has deeply troubled me, Mr. Speaker. I have looked forward to an opportunity to make the following comments in the House: Those of us who come from western Canada have always and will always regard ourselves as being as Canadian as those who come from other parts of the country. The Manitoba debate as it has become known has raised in the minds of some and on the editorial boards of certain newspapers the question of whether or not we in Manitoba and perhaps in western Canada as a whole understand the country. Our roots are deeply embedded in the soil of Manitoba.

As one who represents a riding which contains Canadians of English descent, a great number of Canadians of Francophone descent and many Canadians of multicultural descent, I say to Members in the House that we came to Canada and specifically to Manitoba with our cultures, our languages, our hopes and our dreams. These have become the realities of western Canada.

I would make the point that it was a necessity and a reality for those of us whose language was neither French nor English that English became the language of common communication. That is reality. I cannot change that and I do not want to change that. That is the way it is in the area in which I live.

I would also make the point that there is no solution to this problem in Manitoba or in the rest of the country that will be good for the unity of the country if we are to use these kinds of methods to try to develop solutions. Tolerance is not enough. What we need is understanding.

I say to my friends opposite that I want to understand them. All that we as western Canadians ask is that they understand our realities as well. We will build a better country if we understand each other. Let us put behind us the use of resolutions on language or cultural matters. Let us not try to indicate that such a resolution might be to the advantage of one group, because we will not build a country that way. Canada is a great country. We are diverse, and that is our reality. That diversity can also lead us to greater understanding and it can and should be a model to the rest of the world.

I say to my friends opposite that I believe that a solution to the Manitoba situation will come just as I saw a solution come yesterday to the problems of the Canadian municipalities association which is now meeting in Winnipeg. That solution was based on understanding, on dialogue and finally on agreement. Let us follow that route and not the one chosen today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bob Ogle (Saskatoon East): Mr. Speaker, I have only a few minutes to speak on this issue today but I am happy to be afforded an opportunity to say a few words about it.

• (1750)

In general, I support what this Bill is attempting to do. I appreciate, as I imagine the mover of the Bill appreciates, that there was no chance that it would pass today. Nevertheless, it has given Members of the House another opportunity to speak on this matter. I congratulate both the mover of the Bill and the Hon. Member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) for addressing it from their points of view. As Members know, I speak from a political position in the sense of a political future in this House. I would like to add to that the feeling which I have regarding what has taken place in our country, particularly in Manitoba.

I believe that one of the major factors in the debate has been fear of the unknown. When there is fear, there is distortion. I grew up in a world which was not unlike Manitoba. I grew up in Saskatchewan. When I was a child, I literally lived in a language laboratory. If I had known what it was and if I had been open to it, I could have learned seven languages within two miles of where I was living. Unfortunately, at that particular time in history, my parents—who were Irish, from Quebec and completely bilingual in French and English—felt that there was something wrong in passing on to their children the ability to speak bilingually. I do not know why they felt that way. Thank God that is no longer true. On my way home to Saskatoon the other day, I rode with the president of the French schools in Saskatoon. He cannot speak a word of French. His four children are in the schools because he wants them to be bilingual. Somehow or other the fear that my parents were able to instil into our generation will not, I hope, be instilled into the next generation.

When I was about seven or eight years of age, there was an old French Canadian farmer who had come from Quebec and had become bilingual. He spoke with an accent, but he spoke English very clearly. He told me that I should learn another language. He told me that a language is a very light load to carry. That was great advice because a language is a very light load to carry. There is nothing to be afraid of in being able to understand another person who speaks another language. No one in Canada is forced to learn another language. They do not have to learn English nor do they have to learn French. However, it is very nice to be able to speak two, five or ten languages. What is really required is a change in mentality. That may come in the next generation, although I believe that the confrontation which has taken place in recent history in Manitoba would not bring that about. There seems to have been a lack of will to reach an understanding.

On November 15, 1976, I was returning to Canada after spending a year doing research with the International Development Research Centre in India. I was not aware of the fact that there was an election taking place in Quebec that day. I had been in India where there are 23 states. The states of India are basically divided by language. Although there are 400 languages or more, India has built itself into 23 states, basically with the same language groups. India does its official business in English and Hindi. With this massive number of languages and the massive division, this country, with a popu-