

National Unity

deliberately to pit one race against another is growing indifference and, in far too many cases, growing hostility. The reality is that Canadians do not understand each other. Perhaps our country is too large or too diverse, or perhaps we are all too preoccupied with making a living to really care. Or perhaps we are all victims of a prime minister who, for the last nine years, has been concerned solely with political survival.

Central Canada has spent the last half century producing people who are not British, who are not French, but are simply Canadians. The same process has been going on in Western Canada only for the last two decades. Western Canada has a different vision of this nation from the vision which central Canada holds. It arises from a different historical experience and perspective in Canada.

● (2130)

The settlement patterns of the east, New France, the maritime colonies, the Acadians and the Loyalists of Ontario were groups of people who settled, struggled, endured and finally, with a lasting tenacity took hold and survived. The roots are deep, unchangeable, unique and crystalized. From this pattern of accepted and established differences has come the concept of Canada as a bilingual and bicultural nation.

In the west the settlement pattern was not one of roots but rather waves, with each successive wave—Indians, French trappers, Scottish settlers, Hudson Bay Company employees, Ontario settlers, and European immigrants—inundating and sweeping over the former. This pattern produced, when the European homesteaders were gradually absorbed, a diluted pan-Canadianism, an optimistic vision of a country from coast to coast and a group of strangers who suffered great hardships, were forced to intermix and ultimately to grope toward a new awareness of themselves and their place in a new Canada.

The people of the west, the sons and daughters of those long trainloads of European immigrants, brought the vision of Canada peddled at the turn of the century. They believed in the unity of this country. They were certain that it was indivisible, that it had a destiny, and they were determined to build it. This concept or notion of one Canada seems to be out of fashion today. The federal government has launched a concept of duality. Everything now is divided into two—English-French, Canada-Quebec, Trudeau-Lévesque. Splitting or dividing has become part of the national fabric, and the people of the west, whose historical background led them to support an antiquated pan-Canadianism, find themselves trying to cope with a new official duality.

Suddenly Canada is two parts, each part fighting to secure its own position and power. The sons and daughters of those European immigrants find that they truly belong on neither side, conveniently forgotten in the fray. They are not French. With their strange last names, their family pasts and their older generations, they are not quite English either. In the growing division, they seem not to belong. With a sense of frustration and confusion, they argue using the old terminology. "We are Canadians", they say, hesitating to select the arbitrary French or English designation before the term.

[Mr. Murta.]

At the present time in Canada there appears to be no place in our national life for this vision held by the west. It appears hopelessly out of date—a remnant from a time when Canada was a young, enthusiastic nation. The eastern vision of Canada is one of duality. Certainly at the present it appears, on the basis of numerical superiority alone, that this vision will triumph. But out west where people feel isolated and removed, where they feel thrust out of the stream of national life—while the Quebec crisis consumes its second decade—there is a feeling of frustration, anger, sadness, and defeat.

Initially the people of the west were receptive to bilingualism, because they were told that it was the price to keep Canada together. Their belief weakens as Quebec drifts toward separation and a diminishing respect for the Canadian confederation. It is my opinion that the people of the west will, for the foreseeable future, be charged with bigotry. They will continue to be described by their own Prime Minister as ignorant rednecks, swearing at bilingual labels on cereal boxes. Their concept of one Canada will inevitably be read as an attempt to impose standardization on all Canadians, to assimilate all cultures and languages, and to force all minorities into one mold. It is not that simple. In reality the people of western Canada earnestly desire that every Canadian, whatever his language or culture, should feel some commitment to his country, some respect for its institutions, and some faith and trust in its future.

For anyone who takes the time to know and understand the people of the west, you will find them generous, frank, optimistic, and loyal. Today they are confused, afraid, skeptical, and isolated. If the federal government could only treat the west as part of this nation and make a serious attempt to explain to them the necessity for its actions, the whole national fabric might be a little bit closer, and a little warmer.

Of all the areas in Canada the west would be most receptive to changes in the structure of Confederation, but the extent of such changes must be carefully studied before they are agreed to. We cannot give away all our heritage and forget all our past in an effort to preserve a territorial unity which may prove to be incapable of preservation. Rather, we must see how far we can go without losing the identity we have now. If we go beyond a certain point, we are no longer Canada. If, as we believe, there are millions in this country who want Canada to remain in being, then we must be ready to pay a price. If we must pay that price, we must also be determined that Canada will continue to exist as a country.

We have a future if our desire, dedication, and sense of nationhood are strong enough. All parts of this country must be represented, all parts of this country must be listened to and understood.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (2140)

Mr. Andy Hogan (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing a lot about separatism since the Parti Québécois victory in November. Allow me to make some