

Government Orders

this law is to permit anyone to remain unilingual, if that is his wish, in all of his relations with the Government of Canada.

If you want to be bilingual, terrific. If you want to remain unilingual and deal with the Government of Canada, the law was designed in such a way as to make sure that both sides of this great national debate and these two perceptions could be accommodated equally.

What is more appropriate for a country that values its linguistic duality and protects its linguistic minorities in an imperfect nation such as ours? While we have many advantages and many accomplishments, our imperfections show every day of the week. What would be more appropriate than to proceed on a sensitive and delicate issue along the lines that Mr. Pelletier suggested in 1974.

[*Translation*]

It is time, Mr. Speaker, to remind ourselves what it is like to be a minority and to treat minorities with the same tolerance and generosity of spirit that we would want to be treated with, if our situations were reversed.

[*English*]

How else would you treat a minority, except to ask yourselves what would it be like to be a minority and to treat the minority in exactly the same way that you would want you and your family to be treated if the situation were reversed. Surely that is a fundamental concept of social justice in this country.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: While we happen to be talking about linguistic minorities, the principle holds true for visible minorities and every minority in Canada who is entitled to be treated with justice and equity and equality at all times and in all circumstances in this country of Canada.

[*Translation*]

It is just these values of tolerance and generosity that will help us face an increasingly competitive and interdependent world.

Mr. Speaker, it is such an obvious advantage, and not a handicap, for Canada to speak the world's two leading languages. Our competitors in Europe often speak three languages fluently and four or even five quite well. Today

some Canadians say they are disadvantaged because they want to preserve the integrity of one language. But please, never prevent our young people from learning two languages, because that enriches the whole nation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mulroney: Linguistic duality lies at the foundation of our country and must be constantly preserved and promoted if we are to progress as a nation.

The British North America Act established rights and obligations respecting the use of English and French in Parliament, the Quebec Legislative Assembly and all the courts of Canada and Quebec.

Three years later, these same rights and obligations were extended to the new province of Manitoba.

Section 94 of the BNA Act provided that Parliament could make provision for the uniformity of court procedure in Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia—but not for Quebec whose system of civil law was distinct.

English and French were entrenched as the official languages of New Brunswick in 1982.

In 1988, we adopted a new Official Languages Act to bring our fundamental language law into line with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In adopting the Official Languages Act in 1969, Parliament had recognized the importance of our linguistic duality. But the 1969 Act, in spite of its achievements, had other shortcomings because it focused on the individual's right to obtain services from the government, not on the vitality of minority communities—and thus was not able to halt the erosion of minorities throughout Canada.

The lesson we have learned over the past twenty years is that the strength of the community is critical and must be fostered if linguistic minorities across Canada are to retain their vitality. This is what inspired the major changes supported by all, or almost all, members of this House barely a year and a half ago.

That is why we gave a community orientation to our official languages policy when we adopted the new Official Languages Act.