

Official Languages Act

I think it is time we put an end to this tired joke whereby year after year the departments do not even bother to read the recommendations of this officer of parliament.

There are two measures which I adamantly defend, namely that people who can complain of non-compliance with the act will always be able to refer these cases to the courts but they must first of all lodge their complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages. There is also a measure inspired by the equal opportunity act of the U.S. whereby the federal government, not only in its own institutions but also through the various fiscal and budgetary measures it adopts as regards its suppliers and so on would require that they also do their share and take on themselves part of the national unity burden.

Mr. Speaker, it is always a problem, a test of sincerity. Personally, I have heard enough talk on national unity, I would like to hear of concrete measures from all concerned, of how much they are willing to pay to play their part in this great project to preserve the unity of our country. It has been my experience that everyone is in favour of virtue, but becomes hesitant and even evasive when the time comes to test the public's sincerity.

There is the Public Service Alliance which refuses a project as essential as that of sharing the wealth of the country between both sides of the river, between Ottawa and Hull; in their press release they gave about twenty reasons for refusing to travel three extra miles to work in a French atmosphere such as that which exists in Hull. I tell myself that if people in the national capital are not more generous, there is great cause to be pessimistic. So, Mr. Speaker, what this bill is getting at is that what is important, above all, is concrete action.

[English]

Mrs. Ursula Appolloni (York South): Mr. Speaker, I should like to start by congratulating the sponsor of this bill for his very diligent and conscientious work. Those of us on this side of the House who know him can attest to the passion and devotion he gives French-speaking Canadians, and I hope they will repay him in full for his integrity and his great work on their behalf. I might also say that as a female Canadian I can share to a large extent his frustrations over what he terms discrimination, being the lack of proper representation in government departments. We females know what it means to be in the so-called minority, and we hope that situation will change too.

I remember when I was studying British history in England and one of my history books said that in retrospect the great fire of London was a very good thing; it was really an act of God. Despite the fact that it destroyed an entire city, it also destroyed the black plague and got rid of all sorts of other pestilence. Taking that analogy, we could say in retrospect that the election of the Parti Québécois was perhaps a good thing because it made Canadians from coast to coast conscious of the troubles that are facing French Canadians—their frustrations, their anger and their aspirations. I hope this con-

[Mr. Bané.]

sciousness on the part of English-speaking Canadians will continue and even heighten.

● (1622)

Having said that, I would like to deal with the bill at hand, Bill C-202. Despite the fact that I agree and sympathize with the sponsor in what he is trying to achieve, there is one particular part to which I take very serious exception, and I hope the sponsor with his own sense of fair play will see fit to amend it. At the very beginning of the bill, in referring to its purpose, it reads "linguistic and cultural objectives". My whole objection is to the fact that he has mixed in the same bill linguistic and cultural needs. He even speaks of a cultural policy for Canada. John A. Macdonald in 1890 said that there is no paramount race in this country. I would hope those words are as true today as they were in 1890.

I believe that we must take the initiative and make adjustments in order to enable French-speaking Canadians to participate fully in the country they played a leading role in helping to explore, to settle and to found. I agree with the sponsor when he says we must pay a price for Canadian unity, but I would like to know exactly what the price is. We English-speaking Canadians are willing to pay a big price, but what exactly is it? Do we have to relinquish our own cultural identity?

I hope that is not the price, because if so 26 per cent of the population of Canada will not relinquish their identity, nor have they been asked to do so by the federal government. Although culture and language are profoundly related, there is a clear distinction between them. We must be very careful to observe that distinction whenever we speak of the two. Language is a vehicle of communication.

I believe both English and French should have equal value in this country of Canada. However, culture is a totally different thing. It is very complex, dealing with attitudes, feelings, values, emotions and traditions. When we go back into the history of Canada we must remember that from the beginning of this century, for some 77 years, people have come to this country who spoke neither English nor French, nor had the cultures of England or France. They came here and adopted one of the official languages. Unfortunately, most chose to adopt English; but the point is they kept their own culture.

I recommend that we do not adopt that particular part of this bill. Language to me is learned through the brain, but culture is learned from the heart and by the heart. There is no way you can impose it on other people. Culture should not even belong to just one group. It should be multi-faceted if it is to be strong and rich. One of Canada's riches is the diversity of her culture and we should be very proud of that fact.

In the government publication entitled "A National Understanding" we are warned:

Attempts to mould people who speak the same language or belong to the same political entity into a homogeneous cultural pattern or conception endangers their very freedom. Such attempts must be studiously avoided by the state, and fiercely resisted by citizens. For this reason, countries and peoples who value