

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements

prepared to pay the cost in dollars and cents of a united country which sees itself from coast to coast as one Canada.

If we look at the problem from a positive point of view, which very few of us have done, the people of Quebec have presented to the rest of Canada, possibly without knowing it and certainly without meaning to, an opportunity to build a strong and more unified country.

There are some English-speaking Canadians, unfortunately a growing number, who view the bilingual nature of Canada not as a source of pride but as an annoying condition that somehow must be removed. They would welcome the departure of Quebec and the breakup of Canada. There are French speaking Canadians who have lost faith in the rest of Canada and urge separation. I believe that the majority of Canadians in both cultures have retained a spirit of good will toward their neighbours and have a desire to make Confederation work.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Murta: Those of us who share this belief must ask ourselves some simple questions. First, is there a risk of Canada's breaking up? Obviously, judging by what I and others have said, the answer is yes, there is a risk of Canada's breaking up.

● (2130)

Second, will a recognition of the fact that Canada is a country with two major languages help to unite the country? The answer is, hopefully, yes. I say hopefully, because at times there has not been much hope of this being the case. But we are looking to that fact to be a stronger uniting force. Along with the recognition of two languages and cultures must go the recognition of many other communities and ways of life.

Third, is the cost of this recognition in money and petty annoyances worth paying? This question is crucial, a question all Canadians must answer. Bilingual labels in supermarkets, signs in French at airports, and French television and radio involve no more than a very small percentage of our gross national product. Surely if we believe in Canada, this is a small cost to pay. Likewise, turning a box of cornflakes around in order to read the English is not too large a gesture to make for the unity of Canada.

But there is a larger cost, that being the recognition of the many disparities in Canada not only between the founding cultures, but throughout the country. I believe earlier attempts at unity failed because they ignored diversity in favour of a highly centralized national policy which used tariffs and railways as its chief instruments. This policy shaped a nation with an industrial heartland feeding on the raw materials of the regions of the country. The results, of course, were obvious—a concentration of jobs and people in a few large centres, a lack of processing and manufacturing in many of the resource regions of the country and, most important, a large group of people who did not enjoy the natural benefits which Confederation ought to bring.

[Mr. Murta.]

This policy of inequality has contributed to the unhappiness in French Canada and also created great strains for the rest of Canada. In particular those living in the prairies, the maritimes and Northwest Territories feel aggrieved and not part of the action. People in these areas feel that Canada does not and never did make economic sense.

The truth is, Canada exists because the people of the country want it to exist, because it embraces values not found anywhere else in the world. It exists not because of economic realities, but despite those realities.

As we in the prairies see it, the bargain struck at Confederation was that tariffs set by the federal government would protect Canadian industries in central Canada against international competition. At the same time transportation policies formulated by the federal government would allow the regions, the west, northern Canada and the maritimes, to get their products outside, to be sold, and to get the manufactured goods they needed.

This bargain has never really worked. Power and wealth have concentrated in central Canada, while in the hinterland there has grown a feeling of injustice and inequity. Confederation was supposed to require everyone to make concessions and sacrifices in order to make the country succeed. Successive federal governments have followed the policy which says that those outside central Canada should suffer most.

Westerners continue to be alarmed by attempts to change Confederation. They want assurances, as do those living in the maritimes, that because they want to live and work in what they consider as special areas, or places, they will not be penalized for doing so.

The future of Canada will only be secured when all Canadians can be assured that the burdens and advantages of Canada will be shared equally. That is the central point to which we must address ourselves if we are concerned about our long-term future as a country.

I think that we, in this country, have reason to be optimistic. I say I think; I hope I am right. I hope we may be on the threshold of a new era of Canadian confederation, an era marked by greater awareness of provincial and regional needs and sensitivities, greater respect for the diversity of culture and heritage which characterizes the various parts of this country and, in the not too distant future, by a better balance as between the centre and periphery of the country. This is the concept for which we must strive, in both official languages, and all regions. We must be united in the knowledge that Canada is unique among the nations of the world and must be preserved. We must keep in mind that Canada is more, much more than just dollars and cents.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying that I and, I think, other members of this House, were greatly moved by the speech which the hon. member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta) has just concluded. All of us agree with him when he says that if Canada means anything as a country, it is as a country which stretches from sea to sea, and that it is inconceivable that the country should be less than