

ments comprise a respect for our linguistic and other minorities, a long-held desire to encourage their flowering, and the duty to protect the rights of our minorities—wherever they are.

Manitoba is going through a period of disturbance. In making this gesture today, I do not want to exacerbate the complexity of this situation. In the final analysis it is up to Manitobans themselves to decide. I hope that Manitoba's leaders, who I assume are acting in good faith, will work together in a spirit of generosity to ensure that Franco-Manitobans are treated with dignity and respect.

Thus we have today the occasion to state our position on this question here in the House of Commons. By this resolution before us, we are asked to make a gesture. The significance and the impact of this action relate first and foremost to profoundly human values, values which define to a large degree the kind of generosity of spirit typical of Canadian society.

It is with pride that I announce today, in the name of my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative Party, our unanimous support for the resolution which is before this House.

● (1530)

[English]

Years ago this House approved the principle of official bilingualism for Canada. Simply put, it means that English and French Canadians shall have equal rights and equal opportunities across Canada. It is a noble principle, one which is capable of enriching the life of this nation. By our stand today we reaffirm our commitment and that of our Party given earlier in this same House of Commons by outstanding and distinguished Canadians such as the Hon. Robert Stanfield and the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark).

Bilingualism is a valued principle and an indispensable dimension of our national life. The program, however, must be implemented with fairness and with equity. It is diminished if it comes to be perceived by large numbers of Canadians as an instrument of division or an instrument of unfairness. Governments must always be alert to this possibility. Excessive zeal and regrettable statements by public officials have seriously hindered worthy programs in the past. We do not want that to happen here.

We are all children of our environments. We bring to given problems the judgment that has been shaped by the realities to which we have been exposed in our lives. In Canada, particularly in the area of language, these differ widely according to individuals and according to regions because of our sense of history. We must seek to understand these differences and consider them not as obstacles but as guides to the elaboration of sensible and realistic policies which will enhance rather than lessen the attractiveness of such policies in the minds of all Canadians. Sensitivity to people and the presumption of good faith should be the hallmarks of implementation. They will ensure for bilingualism a more durable character and more

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pervasive acceptance. In the larger sweep of history these qualities will have served the country better than a divisive gesture or an uncaring remark.

I want to say a word to the people of Manitoba. I am aware of the problems that have arisen in many of your communities. We do not seek today to make them more difficult. Sadness always results when there is division among us. Strong people take strong stands on major issues and have done so throughout our entire history.

Our days together as Canadians have not always been glorious but neither have they been without absolutely splendid accomplishment. For all our imperfections, we remain in Canada a country of promise and a people of hope. We have come through so much together against overwhelming odds that our citizenship has become a privileged symbol in our lives. Our respect for the rule of law, our unparalleled record in civil liberties, our sense of tolerance, our respect for our neighbour and his property have combined to make Canada an admired nation in the world.

The issue before us today is one that must be approached in a spirit of conciliation. This is a quality for which Manitobans are renowned. It does honour to them and to their Province. The issue before us today is also one of simple justice. There is no painless way to proceed. There is no blame to be apportioned. There are no motives to be impugned. There is only the sanctity of minority rights. There is no obligation more compelling and no duty more irresistible in Canada than to ensure that our minorities, linguistic and otherwise, live at all times in conditions of fairness and justice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: The Manitoba Members of Parliament in our caucus, along with many Manitobans at home, have been deeply troubled by this issue. I have shared with them their moments of anguish but they have responded with courage and with respect. In a great unifying gesture to all of Canada they stand with me and our Party today in a historic and unforgettable endorsement of a fundamental tenet of this nation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Mulroney: My friend, Robert Cliche, was a great humanist who sought, at all times, conciliation, the right approach, respect for the common man whose rights have been abused. He often quoted Felix Antoine Savard who once wrote: "Happy are those men and those peoples who get along together".

I believe, Madam Speaker, that with this resolution we have helped the process of reconciliation which must take place in Manitoba.