

● (2230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Pinard (Drummond): Mr. Speaker, it is an honor and a privilege for me as a member of this House to take part in this important debate on national unity. Is it possible to live together in Canada in each of our two large linguistic and cultural communities? Can each one be respectful of the rights, dignity and existential needs of the other? Is this not an important and basic principle in this country? Historically, for over a century, has this principle been reasonably respected? The negative answer to this question explains in part the present unrest in our Canadian society. Therefore, it has become important and indeed vital in order to correct this situation, to improve the way our Confederation operates, and to prevent the splitting of our country, to change some of our attitudes and offer a third option between separation and status quo.

I do not think I am being overnationalistic and on the contrary I believe I am being realistic and objective in laying the blame on the English speaking community in this country for not respecting, as it may and should have done, the French speaking community, in the course of this first century of Confederation. If English Canadians had agreed to treat French Canadians as equals, if they had dealt with them without a complex of superiority and if they had carried out with them a relationship based on respect and dignity all over this country and in all areas of human endeavour we would not be witnessing today the withdrawal on its own territory of a people, a dangerously high proportion of whom, now believes that it is the only way to preserve its language, culture and community and we would not be facing today this threat of assimilation of the French speaking minority outside Quebec into the English speaking Canadian melting pot.

If the West had been more receptive to the efforts and representations of my right honorable predecessor as representative of the Drummond constituency in the House of Commons, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who having later become prime minister of Canada, pleaded the French Canadian cause in the newly formed provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan and if Manitoba had not literally eliminated the language of its pioneers by banishing French from its schools, courts and legal books, if Ontario had refrained from forbidding the use of French in the schools of its minority who at the beginning of the century numbered in the thousands! If in the Maritime they have earlier given full recognition to the important French-speaking minority by officially acknowledging the French language and culture, giving people full access to all levels of education in their mother tongue, in other words, if our two communities outside Quebec had coexisted on equal terms, if only they had coexisted!

It seems to me that the frustration of French Canadians is well justified when we consider the privileged lot that the French-speaking majority in Quebec reserved at that time for its important English-speaking minority which, in addition, always dominated on the economic level. And recently, the no compromise attitude of the CALPA and CATCA concerning

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air bilingualism, and the defeatist attitude of Donald Creighton who said "No more concessions" to Quebec certainly do not contribute to improve the situation. If on one hand some changes in attitude and mentality are needed, and they are justified by the historic background that I just depicted, fortunately we now see evidence of those changes, on the other hand the fact that a majority, a part I should say of the present French-speaking community is prepared to forget all about Canada seems to me basically unfair and inappropriate, for their ancestors as well as for their descendants, for themselves and for their fellow citizens who want to maintain the unity of our country. Our forefathers gave us examples of fight and courage, not of defeat. What an insult to those who have built and protected this beautiful and great country if we let go a large part of territory with all its resources and if we let our French-speaking brothers and sisters outside Quebec alone to defend their cultural and linguistic heritage. What a denial of justice to our children who have a right to those huge material and cultural resources which we will abandon on their behalf without their authorisation. What a shame if we were to deprive them of the noble right to realize themselves the great challenge of diversity when they attain their majority.

Most young people see the world and things around them in quite a different way. Those young people openly express in many ways that they disagree with the value system generally accepted by our generation. They reject materialism and they often renounce the comfort to develop nature worship. They believe in a better world where there would be more room for fraternity, social conscience, love, liberty and peace.

Can we spare them the scandal of this useless ravage of a country in an affluent society and in the eyes of a world far more complex to whom it is repugnant to show this example of a social failure? For those who might be tempted to separate, what masochism! Why give in to frustration in a reaction so exaggerated that it might deprive them not only of an invaluable good but, as well, in the present state of affairs, would gain them the qualification of renegade? Are not the French Canadian people a hard working, tenacious and courageous people? Is it not prepared to share since its generosity is proverbial? Does not its great jovial humour make it one of the most sociable? Does not its prudence incite it to let someone else bear the burden of the proof of a better condition, those who, through interest or opportunism, want to break the country to try and create another one?

And what treason, Mr. Speaker, in respect of all French Canadians in Quebec and in other provinces who chose to work towards the achievement of equality of our two linguistic groups, within the federal government or outside it, while respecting Canadian unity! Why abandon the remarkable work of the Trudeaus, Marchands, Pelletiers and others?

The courage French Canadians have shown through difficult times and the measure of success they have met with in Ottawa and elsewhere over the last 10 years in particular warrant us to persevere, to believe in our fulfilment and to strive for it in harmony with our English-speaking fellow Canadians. The important thing, therefore, as the distin-