

*Official Languages*

a grievance, some people always think they are asking for favours. We French Canadians never ask for favours. We are merely asking for the recognition of our legitimate rights. And here is a bill which recognizes legitimate rights as regards French Canadians.

I ask the English-speaking majority members, whatever their political affiliation, to be very open-minded in dealing with the bill before us.

It is obvious, as concerns the western provinces, that some members are in a fairly difficult position for, as the Minister of Justice pointed out today, perhaps the bill was not well explained to their constituents. I say to the Minister of Justice as well as to the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier), who are piloting this bill together, that they will have to provide full information after the passage of this bill, in order to overcome the difficulties as to the interpretation of the bill in certain parts of this country.

Of course, it is the duty of the government to advise the people of what the bill entails so that Canadians, knowing all its details, can accept it objectively.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that although the bill is being studied in a tense atmosphere, although there will be major objections to it—there are fundamental objections to it, which some members have already started bringing up, and others, I am sure, will follow suit—we must still prove to the country that the representatives of the people, English-speaking as well as French-speaking, are capable of assuming their responsibilities, of studying a bill with serenity which, to my mind, is of capital importance to the future of the Canadian confederation.

What happens to this bill will tell us whether there is still hope for Canada as we now know it. If there is filibustering, if objections are raised irresponsibly to play up the misgivings expressed by some sectors of our population, under the pretext that there is no need for bilingualism or biculturalism in Canada, if life is to go on as it does now when the rights of a third of the Canadian people are being overlooked, we French-Canadians of the province of Quebec sitting in this house will have to ask ourselves certain questions with regard to our presence here in this House of Commons.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask our English-speaking colleagues to show some understanding during this debate. May I also ask for their co-operation.

[Mr. Asselin.]

• (4:50 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, there is unrest in Quebec. English-speaking members often tell us: "You speak of separatism, but that is to blackmail us, to obtain concessions." I say, Mr. Speaker, that the percentage of separatists in Quebec is higher than one would think.

Recently, an important Montreal paper carried out a survey and, according to its findings, Mr. René Lévesque's party could obtain 25 per cent of the votes in the next election. Well, I hope that those findings are inaccurate.

The fact remains that if one travels through the province, one finds out that there are important groups of separatists with leaders in every corner of the province.

Is it because the members from Quebec who sit in this house did not do their duty adequately or did not discharge their responsibilities? Better late than never. We must now take our responsibilities, we must show not only to the French Canadians of Quebec, but also to those living in other provinces, and to the English Canadians as well, that at least in the House of Commons it is possible to achieve unanimity on a piece of legislation as important as that which is now under consideration.

Mr. Speaker, before concluding my remarks, I say that all Canadians have a duty to make every possible effort to build the Canada of tomorrow, which cannot be anything but a bilingual or bicultural country. Otherwise, there will no longer be a Canada, and it will be useless to offer band-aid solutions to problems of French Canadians of Quebec or other provinces because they would be rejected straight off. In my opinion, Canada will be bilingual and bicultural or it will be no more. It would fall apart.

In spite of its defects, Bill C-120 is a step forward in making the country where we want to live bilingual and bicultural. If the country is not bilingual and bicultural, it will fall apart, because a major portion of our people can no longer live otherwise than as equal partners, in every respect.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted this afternoon to speak calmly and state the problem now existing throughout Canada. I represent a rural constituency of the province of Quebec. We know that there are problems. Let us build together this new Canada. I wanted to appeal to the goodwill and open-mindedness of my English-speaking colleagues and tell them: "Better late than never." We should at least agree about the bill now before us if we