

Official Languages

I refer in passing—this strongly motivated the amendment I have put before the house this afternoon—to the fact that there is rapid progress toward transferring responsibility in respect of what might be recognized by all members of the house as the ethnic group which has been most seriously ignored and violated from the standpoint of its fundamental rights. I refer to our first Canadians, the Indians and Eskimos. We know there is a move under way that will gradually transfer to the provincial level the major responsibilities for ensuring first-class citizenship status to our native population. This policy has been agreed to on both sides of the house. In view of this transfer of responsibility to the provinces, I believe the provinces should have a special concern and voice in these matters. This, of course, applies also to other ethnic groups.

As I look at the other amendments on the order paper I am reassured to find that we will have an opportunity to debate this matter under another amendment which deals with the problems of multiculturalism and multilingualism in western Canada. As I indicated in my opening remarks in reply to your question, Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to introduce a discordant note as we begin this important debate. Certainly I do not wish to trespass upon any area that would be regarded as a provincial matter. I do not wish to interfere with provincial affairs. I agree that this matter should be left to the continuing constitutional conference, which I hope will arrive at a formula that will make it easier for the people of every province of Canada to feel at home in all other parts of this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Dinsdale: The minister from Manitoba, the hon. member for Winnipeg South (Mr. Richardson), speaks in the same accents, because he said recently that he is more concerned with interpreting western Canada to Ottawa than he is Ottawa to western Canada. I agree heartily with that statement, because we sometimes feel there is difficulty in communicating a viewpoint which some of us who come from western Canada regard as being peculiar to the west. I do not mean that westerners are peculiar, but they do have a peculiar viewpoint in this respect.

During the course of the debate it has been suggested that westerners are bigots in matters pertaining to civil liberties, cultural and linguistic equality and all the other matters

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

raised in the debate. I deny this most vehemently. Members from western Canada are, above all else, most tolerant. Because we were raised in a climate of minorities we have achieved an amazing degree of the spirit of Canadianism out of a diversity that appears on the surface almost insurmountable.

In bringing these remarks to a conclusion, Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me, in the light of Your Honour's comment, in the light of what happened at the meetings last week in Ottawa and the entente cordiale achieved by the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, that the provinces are quite capable of looking after their own interests in this respect. I would therefore leave them to take whatever action they feel is necessary.

I think our chief concern at this time, as we face a fundamental issue of confederation, is to emphasize the necessity of national unity. National unity in Canada can be achieved only out of great diversity and by emphasizing those things which all Canadians have in common. I trust that each one of us will be aware of the situation. We are forced by government action into a debate on a matter that is very delicate. It involves a confrontation in extremely sensitive areas, and it is my hope that as the provinces and Ottawa continue to negotiate they will work out a satisfactory formula in the spirit of the law rather than from the standpoint of the letter of the law that will take into consideration the rights of all the minorities in this great country of ours.

• (3:20 p.m.)

With those remarks in mind and so as not to precipitate a confrontation at this moment, and certainly not to dilute the spirit of good will and amity that has been generated thus far this afternoon, I ask for the unanimous consent of the house to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Speaker: Has the hon. member leave to withdraw the amendment?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion (Mr. Dinsdale) withdrawn.

Mr. Baldwin: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Before Your Honour puts the next amendment, may I put forward for your consideration the question of the exercise of discretion which Your Honour has under the appropriate Standing Order with regard to the calling of votes on amendments which may be considered by the house from time to time. In