

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements

their ancestors were pioneers that the majority of Quebecers have until now—and I am convinced it is still the case—adhered to our federal system even if they wish some changes to it. Mr. Speaker, federalism facilitates their self achievement as an autonomous community without the hazards inherent in a largely illusive sovereignty.

However, federalism will be saved in our country only if the association of our two communities is based on the equality of the two cultures and the mutual acceptance of the two languages through which they are channeled. The future of our country could be threatened if, because of the fanaticism of some extremists, a majority of Quebecers were led to the conclusion that they are no longer wanted in Canada and that there is no room for the French culture in their own country. Mr. Speaker, they are already seriously hurt by all these irritating remarks against the presence of a few words of French on mere commercial labels. They are indignant because some circles bitterly resent the expansion of French radio and television networks throughout Canada or want to deny Francophones the right to use French in their air communications over Quebec territory.

I am perfectly aware of the fact that most Anglophones are foreign to these explosions of bigotry, just as most Quebecers do not share this hostility to the English language. However it is high time moderates speak out and remind those who might be tempted to forget it that the development of one culture does not require of necessity the destruction of the other. Yet, I do not see why, because they are a minority, French Canadians should be the only ones to bear the consequences, if any, of a national policy on bilingualism.

When a country such as Canada has the rare privilege of having as its official languages those of two of the greatest modern cultures, it must be proud to use that privilege and share it with all its national institutions. The federal government must not be the only one to have that concern. The provinces' role is just as vital if we are to reach the level of linguistic and cultural equality without which bilingualism will only be an irrelevant motto. Canada's future lies not only in the distribution of jurisdictions between the various levels of governments. It is also linked to the way we treat our minorities, both in Quebec and elsewhere.

The time has not come yet, Mr. Speaker, to launch the great referendum campaign in Quebec, but it seems we are getting nearer to it. For the time being let me remind Quebec's new leaders that on November 15, they received a mandate to prepare such a referendum, but not to go through with independence. Indeed Quebecers entrusted them with their votes mainly because in the meantime they made a commitment to behave as a loyal provincial government rather than a sovereign one. They should not renege on their word. But as far as I am concerned, I would like to conclude by saying that with or without a referendum, my choice is made and I am all for Canada!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Wagner.]

Mr. Wagner: While a true Quebecer, I opted for Canada because at a time of federalism I have no wish to go counter-history wise. I choose to be a Canadian because I want to be true to my forbears' will, and Canada is the homeland they asked me to serve. I choose to be a Canadian because I will not be lured by the sirens of doubtful sovereignty whose benefits have not been proved. I choose to be a Canadian because I will not dive blindly into the unknown. I will not gamble my people's future at Russian roulette. I choose to be a Canadian because my fellow countrymen in other provinces need a Canadian Quebec.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wagner: They need a Canadian Quebec to survive and conquer their place in the sun. I choose to be a Canadian because I refuse to bury myself in a morbid isolation in which Quebec would merely be the shadow of what it formerly was, in which its culture and economy would constantly be jeopardized. I choose to be a Canadian because I do not renounce, I do not renounce any part of my heritage, because I like every little bit of this country which my fathers have discovered and erected. I choose to be a Canadian because I want to feel at home in the quiet villages of the maritime provinces, in industrial cities of Ontario, in the wide western plains and in the magnificent mountains of the Pacific coast. But in turn I want to be accepted in this country as equal and I want my mother tongue to be recognized as a betterment of the Canadian heritage.

I choose to be a Canadian, because Canada, whatever can be said, is one of the great achievements of history, and I call to witness the many people who envy its power and prestige. I choose to be a Canadian because in Canada I find protection of my democratic freedoms and respect for the cultural values which I was entrusted with. I choose to be a Canadian because, after all, Mr. Speaker, the social stability, economic progress, cultural influence and even the international prestige of the province of Quebec are closely linked to Canada.

• (1610)

[English]

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments on this bill. I am a little unhappy about following the great and illustrious speaker from Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner), who just resumed his seat. However, I will do my best not to bore too many people. I am sure I will not be able to live up to his great performance. I have the responsibility to make a few comments in this debate because the fiscal arrangements act touches a significant number of federal-provincial fiscal arrangements which fall under the general subject of health. Being my party's health critic, I want to participate.

We had a very long debate on the subject of health less than a year ago, a debate dealing with Bill C-68 as it was known at that time. In my view, it was one of the first clear indications of the attitude of this government which created the difficulties this country has been experiencing over the past decade or