

Government Orders

it has been immeasurably enriched by people from every country of the world who have now made of Canada a truly modern, tolerant society.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, few subjects have so aroused public opinion and stirred such individual passions as the debates over language.

But some of the finest chapters in our history were written by those who made the voice of reason prevail, who made tolerance triumph and who wrought the necessary accommodations.

[*English*]

Linguistic duality and the protection of minority language rights are not abstract concepts. They are given life by legislative enactments such as the Official Languages Act. They are given permanence and protection by the Constitution and they are given meaning by the national will of a generous and a tolerant people.

[*Translation*]

The rejection of minorities is an attack on the nature of Canada. When language becomes a motive for exclusion and fear, it is time for all Canadians who love their country to speak up and speak out.

There is no place in Canada for intolerance—although no one would suggest that Canada, or any other country, is absolutely free from it.

The resolution now before the House is an opportunity for all members to speak up and speak out, again, for what is best about Canada.

It is an opportunity to send an absolutely unequivocal message, again, of unity and mutual respect.

The issue before us is not bilingualism or even, despite claims to the contrary, the expense of bilingualism.

The issue before us is simple and important—the will of English- and French-speaking Canadians to continue to live together with mutual respect and fraternity, while

honouring our original undertakings to each other and to the whole nation.

[*English*]

It is time to refer back to some of our fundamental values and I think it is also time to try to put this entire issue in some perspective. This is not the first time nor will it be the last time that there have been misconceptions and misrepresentations on the government's policies regarding official languages.

This is not the first time nor will it be the last that certain voices have been heard alleging that the policy constitutes enforced bilingualism. Something is being “rammed down people's throats”. Surely that phrase and that expression had to arise in Canada. Only in a country this prosperous and this magnificent would people have the time to worry about expressions like that. Nothing is being forced down anybody's throat, although the concept of enforced bilingualism or a double standard, one for Quebec and another for the rest of the country, has been alleged in this country from the days of the Confederation debates. There have always been voices, fortunately few and far between. But there have always been voices who have tried to trade on this kind of falsehood and distortion that fortunately has been repudiated time and time and time again by this Parliament, regardless of its composition and regardless of the government that happened to be sitting at the right of the Speaker.

• (1550)

There is no better way to bury these damaging misunderstandings than to recall the words of one of the original architects of the original Official Languages Act. In 1974, the Hon. Gerard Pelletier, then Minister of Communications, spoke as follows, and I quote:

—some people were surprised recently by my statement favouring the promotion of an intensely French Quebec. They thought they saw a contradiction with the federal government's official languages policy. But the efforts of the federal government in linguistic matters has always been subjected to the most absurd interpretations, the most frequent being that the ultimate objective of the Official Languages Act is to make each and every Canadian citizen bilingual. The facts are diametrically opposed to this fable: one of the effects of