

Supply

The hon. member spoke of generosity. Does he really understand the meaning of the word? Does he really know what he is talking about when he speaks of education within and outside Quebec? Does he truly understand this country? He compares Canada to Switzerland and Belgium. Again, does he really understand our country?

Since I will be speaking on this issue a little later, I will conclude by saying that the Reform member should not have worn a dark suit to address this House today, but rather a white sheet.

Mr. Ringma: Mr. Speaker, I find that really sad. It is damn sad. Right at the beginning, I tried to explain it to people, but they have to listen. I said what we are proposing. Obviously, some members did not listen at all and then they attack me, saying that I want to destroy Canada. That is an insult. I must also say that it is awful, what they are saying to the effect that I am attacking the French language. That is false.

• (1235)

I challenge you, Mr. Speaker, and those who did not hear what I said to find those words. When you read *Hansard* tomorrow, or even the blues this afternoon, you will see that we are making an effort to keep Canada united, to preserve the rights of francophones and the rights of anglophones in Quebec. We want everyone to keep their rights, but we do not want it to cost us too much.

Mr. Jean Landry (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question. How do members of the Reform Party explain the economic decline of francophones outside Quebec and what policy do they propose to reduce the gap?

Mr. Ringma: Mr. Speaker, it is very hard for me to explain why francophones' standard of living is falling; I am not an economist and I do not know the reason. It is all a question of money.

Perhaps it is because our economy is in decline and in a very precarious situation now. Foreign governments look at the situation in Canada and think that there is probably a problem between Quebec and the rest of Canada. Also, Quebec is considered to be too hard on anglophones. A lot of money is going out now, the economy is suffering and Quebec too, I suppose.

That is all I can give as an explanation for that question.

[*English*]

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Mr. Speaker, I listened very closely to the hon. member and I am afraid what he proposed is not very clear.

If I understand correctly he rejected a territorial language policy which would have all of Quebec French and the rest of the provinces all English. He seemed to propose a territorial bilingualism in which he said he would accept the extension of the provisions of the Official Languages Act to the minorities in

eastern and northern Ontario, into northeastern New Brunswick and into the west island of Montreal and that there would be unilingualism for the rest of the country.

If I understood him correctly, he was rejecting official bilingualism for any part of the west, including Manitoba. He was rejecting it for the eastern townships where I lived as a child in Sherbrooke and have roots. He was rejecting it for the Gaspé. He was rejecting it for the Outaouais, Aylmer and Papineau county and so on. Is this what I understand?

If that is what he is proposing, it is not as bad as the territorialism which would have all the provinces English except Quebec, but it approaches that. I want to be absolutely clear in what he is proposing. "Where numbers warrant" seem to be exceptionally large "warrants", leaving out francophone minorities in different parts of the country and anglophone minorities in Quebec where they have had long historical roots. I think particularly of the Gaspé and the eastern townships.

Mr. Ringma: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to address the question which is a very legitimate one.

The examples I used were just that. They were examples and were not meant to throw away the St. Boniface area of Winnipeg or the Gaspé or Aylmer or anything of the sort. It was illustrative of the sort of the territorial bilingualism that we should discuss in detail.

The critical matter, and the hon. member mentioned it, is the phrase "where numbers warrant". That is what is in the act today and that is the matter that is giving us such problems. For example we could adopt the policy of the Canadian Association of Municipalities which puts a number on it. It says either 10 per cent or 5 per cent and one can go from there. If the phrase "where numbers warrant" is inadequate, let us put numbers on it and let us collectively agree where we will provide minority language rights.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, just as the importance of official languages is being questioned in this House, I am happy to have this opportunity to clear up some misunderstandings and set the record straight. Official languages issues have always been sensitive. They arouse passion, give rise to rumours and myths and are very seldom approached in a rational manner. Today I would like to set the record straight on official languages and contribute a few thoughts to the debate.

If I may, I would like to start by giving some historical background in order to establish the basic principles behind the Canadian policy on official languages. Official languages in Canada are rooted in both the past and the present. Since French and English have been evolving side by side for several centuries, the Official Languages Act and the policy underlying it do not in themselves represent a new concept, but show the high