

Official Languages

Canadian Parliament to abolish the use of French in the Northwest Territories, and in effect that meant in all western Canada.

There was a resolution moved in the early months of 1890 by Dalton McCarthy, who proposed to abolish the official status of French in western Canada. In that debate Sir John A. Macdonald utters his famous declaration which still stands throughout the land, and I hope will stand during the many centuries that this country will exist. I quote:

I have no accord with the desire expressed in some quarters that by any mode whatever there should be an attempt made to oppress the one language or to render it inferior to the other; I believe that it would be impossible if it were tried, and it would be foolish and wicked if it were possible.

So spake Sir John A. Macdonald on February 7, 1890.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: It was a great speech, Madam Speaker, but if I could be permitted to voice an opinion, I think the greatest speech in that debate was uttered a week later by Edward Blake, who had been leader of the Liberal Party and who sat beside Sir Wilfrid Laurier in the House. Blake—and I think we can keep in mind that he was perhaps one of the greatest legal minds that this country has known—on February 14, 1890 spoke as follows:

I am not of those who believe that our path is made plainer and straighter by the circumstances of different nationalities and of different creeds.

He saw the dangers, Madam Speaker, and the difficulties of a bilingual and multicultural society even in those days. Yet despite the difficulties and dangers he saw ahead, he declared, in words which do him honour, that the survival and development of French-speaking Canadians was “a victory for humanity”. These are his own words, Madam Speaker:

—if, as the case is, it has imposed greater difficulties and more arduous efforts and toils on those who are engaged in making a nation of Canada, it yet, by that very circumstance, gave the chance for more exalted triumphs, gave an opening for the exhibition of still higher and deeper and broader feelings of justice and liberality and tolerance than are permitted to a wholly homogeneous people.

Blake concluded:

—I maintain that it is the duty of those who truly regard the progress and prosperity of Canada, who hope to see it advance in its path towards nationality, to defend the rights of the minorities in this regard, as by law and by convention and by national settlement established. I intend for my part to defend them just as warmly as if I were one of themselves; and I should regard myself dishonoured and disgraced if I were now to yield to the forces which press me to any other course.

That, Madam Speaker, is the spirit of Confederation which this resolution asks the House to endorse today. It is a spirit which goes to the very basis of our society and I am deeply encouraged by the unanimity with which this debate will be concluded, as well as by the spirit of co-operation and understanding which existed between the Leaders of the Parties of this House and which has led us to move this debate and second it, Madam Speaker.

I do believe that this country has entered a new period of understanding. I believe that if the events in Manitoba turn out in the way we hope and pray and in the way we have confidence that the majority of the people of Manitoba will

understand, I have confidence that living in this country will be, for all those minorities and all those other people who are asking for greater measures of justice, a turning point in the life of our nation.

[Translation]

Our forefathers have built a country where life is not particularly easy but is based on tolerance and fraternity. Madam Speaker, we would be unworthy of them if we failed to do everything in our power to make this nation survive and prosper, this magnificent country that was founded on the principle of reciprocity, of cohabitation of cultures and the principle of minority rights.

[English]

Mr. Brian Mulroney (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I speak today on a resolution of consequence before this House. I do so with pride and in the genuine hope that our action will be helpful to our fellow Canadians in Manitoba as they search for an equitable solution to a problem which has troubled the soul of this nation for over 100 years.

[Translation]

The purpose of this resolution is one which has touched the soul of Canada for decades. When I was very young in Baie-Comeau, we were taught at the local school the sad story about some of our Francophone brothers outside of Quebec. Even at that young age, we knew that an injustice had been committed in Manitoba. We did not know why or how, but we knew that certain basic rules—which we Quebecers, Anglophones as well as Francophones, could benefit from—had been broken. A Francophone minority, which had enjoyed an historical protection of its language in Manitoba, was suddenly cut off—amputated—from this guarantee which was so vital. We knew also, Madam Speaker, without being able to really evaluate its consequences, the less than glorious role some of our Quebec leaders had played in the outcome of this very painful situation.

I do not want today to go over all of the steps, again make all of the accusations, recite all of the injustices. Still less do I intend to blame anybody, Madam Speaker. The facts are clear and speak for themselves.

Our collective evolution has determined that two peoples speaking English and French were united in a great national adventure. This unique situation has given birth to our Canadian citizenship. This very noble outcome has not been without failings, Madam Speaker. Neither has it been protected from constant assault by those who wish that we give it up for a less grandiose vision, a more limited country, a less generous mentality. There is even a Member of the PQ government who said that any such initiative to help the Francophone minority in Manitoba was stupid.

This resolution compels us to remember our overriding commitments in this country of almost limitless space, overflowing with great opportunities for the future. These commit-