

Supply

● (1735)

Mr. Duhamel: Mr. Speaker, first I want to make certain that my colleague who just spoke does not misrepresent what I said. I at no time said that we should not be talking about these topics. I said we should be talking about them in an intellectually honest way. I object so much to the suggestion that the costs are such that hospitals are closing and people are suffering as a result of that. That is the intellectual dishonesty to which I refer.

When we talk about territorial bilingualism and demonstrable numbers there is a significant difference in what the critic and some other members of his party are saying. They have to decide whether or not they are talking about the same terms in the same way. I have heard significant differences in the speeches today. I will try to do a standing order statement on those differences just to point them out in case some people think I am exaggerating.

The member suggests I am saying we cannot talk about this. Of course I did not say that. I said we need to build. I suggest that what is being proposed today is destroying and not building. The provinces will not protect minority language rights. Looking at their record, it has not happened over time. That is what would happen.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec-Est): Mr. Speaker, this is a subject that I care deeply about. The rights of francophones outside Quebec are very much affected by the Official Languages Act and this law—

[English]

Official bilingualism in Canada is a complete failure. There is no doubt about the fact that it is a complete failure. The Reform Party talks about costs in dollars and cents but does not refer to the human costs of the failure of official bilingualism in Canada.

There are some MPs who talk about rights, especially anglophones in Quebec talk about their fundamental rights. If there is a community in Canada that has never had their rights respected, it is the francophones outside Quebec. Their rights were denied in spite of guarantees in the Constitution. Those rights were abolished illegally by every single province in Canada, every single one, right after Confederation. It was just Quebec that respected its English speaking minority. Every other province in Canada, every single province abolished French language rights in those provinces.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The answer must be brief; time is already up.

The parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Duhamel: Mr. Speaker, I understand very well that there has been a huge loss for Canada, the whole country, because minority communities like francophones outside Quebec were neglected for years. Because of this neglect, it took extra effort to help them rebuild their infrastructure.

I know that it is not much use making comparisons because we all have our prejudices; I prefer my solution, you prefer yours and so on. Nevertheless, when dealing with such a sensitive subject as this, I would like us to consider people first and what can be done to help them keep the language they had since birth, whether it was French, English or some other language. For me, a Canadian very strongly aware of his roots, I most certainly want all Canadians, not only francophones or anglophones, to be able to keep their language and culture and at the same time to work and join with others.

[English]

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, I will dive right into my speech without commenting on some of the things that have gone on.

● (1740)

In his report to the Prime Minister of England a century ago, Lord Durham's characterization of Canada was profound and enduring. He described English and French Canada as two nations warring within the bosom of a single state. We cannot hide the unfortunate reality that there have always been varying levels of tension between the two groups.

Because of their numbers the English have in times past enjoyed the lion's share of political power within Canada. We find an example in the federal civil service which employed very few francophones in proportion to their share of the population. Federal services were almost unavailable in French, which was clearly unjust. In Ottawa, the nation's capital and an hour and a half from four million francophones, many services were simply unavailable in both official languages.

For nearly a century there was very little overt reaction but Quebec underwent a fundamental transformation after the second world war. After it had served there so nobly like a sleeping giant, Quebec shook itself awake and it defined itself as Confederation's underprivileged partner. Its intellectual elite began to pursue redress with a vengeance in a quiet revolution.

The Canadian way is the way of compromise. Some see this as a political weakness. That can be true, but in general the way of compromise is the way of peace and reconciliation. Rwanda is a nation without compromise. The democratization of South Africa we hope will be an example of noble compromise.

The Liberal government saw that compromise was necessary in order to keep Quebec within Confederation. Under Pearson