

In some cases, that process is characterized by a startling generosity. For example 19 days ago I had the privilege of meeting Nelson Mandela - and hearing him speak of his deep respect for President F.W. de Klerk. Mr. Mandela had just emerged from 27 years in a prison to which he was consigned by the political movement Mr. de Klerk leads. Yet so compelling is his focus on the future that his every reference is to the better society these two men, and the movements they lead, can build together now. I wonder how many of us, after 27 years, would show that generosity toward our jailer? Indeed, how many of us would show the courage Mr. de Klerk demonstrates in taking a party whose religion was apartheid and trying to make it an instrument of reform?

Now - think of Canada - rich, free, respected - by almost any standard the luckiest country in the world, possessing what other peoples only dream of. How are we marking this new era of generosity? How are we making history? Well, let us count the ways.

The Legislature of Alberta would not allow questions in French. The Legislature of Quebec would not allow signs in English. The city of Sault Ste Marie - Sault Ste Marie - declared itself unilingual English. Public meetings have been marked by organized clagues who shout the speaker down. Serious people feel threatened by the idea of any variation in the uniform of the RCMP.

I am not belittling any of this. I know and represent people who feel threatened by the French language, or by what they regard as an erosion of the traditions of the RCMP. I understand why the majority in Quebec is determined to protect its language and culture in an English speaking continent. I know why citizens get mad at politicians whom they think do not listen.

And I am not blaming someone else. Because this distemper in Canada is something we all must resolve together. It requires the kind of generosity and imagination we admire today in Czechoslovakia, or South Africa, or Nicaragua - the kind of generosity and imagination which we like to think characterize Canadians at our best.

We should remember, as Canadians, that there is nothing automatic about our good luck - nothing guaranteed. My family has worked hard in Alberta for three generations, and prospered here. But we did not put the oil in the ground, and no one here can guarantee that our children will inherit a kingdom so peaceable as that in which we grew up. The world has known other serene communities that came apart when anger and antagonism became gradually contagious.

I am not here to raise the question as to whether the Canadian community will continue. I want instead to argue that it should continue. What we have established in Canada is a community worth preserving - but that will require extra effort by all of us.