

Official Languages

Canada owes it to the world to remain united because no lesson is more badly needed than the one our unity can provide—the lesson that diversity need not be a cause for conflict, but, on the contrary may lead to richer and nobler living.

He went on:

Let us open the windows and doors of the provinces. Let us look over the walls and see what is on the other side. Let us know one another, and that will lead to understanding.

● (1720)

I pray God that we may all go forward hand in hand. We can't run the risk of this great country falling into pieces.

All I can say to that is: Amen.

Mr. Heward Grafftey (Brome-Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, most of the problems with which we deal in this House of Commons are political in the truest and best sense of the word. Honest differences underline most of our debates here in this chamber. This idea is, perhaps, central to the fundamental workings of our parliament. Sometimes I become slightly suspicious when members of parliament, individually or collectively, cry out for a bipartisan approach to this or that issue being discussed on the floor of this chamber.

Having said that, I am as sure of one thing as never before: if we as parliamentarians let this debate on bilingualism fall into the partisan political arena, the damage to Canada, and to this parliament as an institution, will be incalculable. In my view, this is no exaggeration. Call it a cliché, call it a motherhood statement, but I approach this debate today in a spirit of seriousness that I have approached no other debate in this House previously.

[Translation]

I am sure of one thing, Mr. Speaker. When—

Mr. Langlois: You should have spoken before the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker).

Mr. Grafftey: I beg your pardon.

Mr. Langlois: You should have spoken before the right hon. member for Prince Albert.

[English]

An hon. Member: You should have spoken before Dief.

Mr. Grafftey: Perhaps I should. But let me say to the hon. member that I do not think it is helpful when the hon. member for Hochelaga (Mr. Pelletier) calls us dinosaurs, or when Mr. Pickersgill says that all the bigots are on this side of the House. I hope the hon. member will contain himself and attempt to ascertain what I am trying to do in this debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I am quite sure of one thing: it rests with each hon. member to see to it that politics is excluded from the debate on bilingualism.

[English]

With questions relating to national unity in the truest sense—bilingualism, multiculturalism and language rights—in spite of what I said at the opening of my remarks, special considerations surely exist which should invoke a bipartisan approach on the part of each and every

[Mr. Symes.]

member of this House. I think most of us realize that this is the first time in the history of the western world that a country has attempted to, let us say, superimpose the parliamentary system on a young federal union which at the same time is multicultural and has certain language rights, as we in Canada have today. Surely, this demands the highest kind of leadership and statesmanship by each and every member of this House. If I sound as though I am preaching a little, I make no apologies. The question of language rights in a young federal union such as Canada should never become the subject matter of partisan political debate, and in this regard I underline again and again the leadership role expected of us in this regard by every Canadian.

If I may digress for a moment, Mr. Speaker, if I deal with general propositions in this House today it is because I deeply feel and believe that they are propositions that must be discussed before we give this resolution, or a bill or amended bill, our approval and clause by clause consideration. All four parties in this House must approach this subject as national parties. To do otherwise would be to abandon the trust that, in my view, the Canadian people have placed in our hands.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, as this debate goes on with other hon. members in the House, I think—and this is not an overstatement—of Canada but also of my constituency of Brome-Missisquoi whose population is 70 per cent French-speaking and 30 per cent English-speaking.

In my own riding, as well as in several other ridings, national unity exists in the true sense of the word. I will remember to my dying day that when I started my political life 15 years ago in Ottawa—I must admit it—I spoke broken French; it was even worse than now. I will remember to my dying day the warm and courteous welcome I received from my constituents, my French-speaking fellow citizens. Like the previous speakers, I have pleasant memories of my first years in Ottawa.

For example, a French-speaking constituent from Farnham in my riding wanted to tender with the Department of National Defence. Immediately after I received his request on the phone and then his letter, the papers from the Public Service in Ottawa arrived at my office written entirely in English. My constituent had to submit his tender within three or four days, and the officials here in Ottawa told me: Mr. Grafftey, you have to wait three or four weeks for a French translation. Mr. Speaker, I found that quite ridiculous 15 years ago, and I hope I finally settled the matter not through an act of Parliament or a regulation, but with a simple phone call.

Let us look now at the other side of the picture, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I am aware of what is going on today, and I do not want, as I said earlier, to make a political issue out of this question, but I remember something that happened a few weeks ago with regard to the government of the province of Quebec. Unfortunately, as I said a while ago—the population is 30 per cent English-speaking in Brome-Missisquoi—too often I write in English to my fellow citizens and to the provincial government and too often I receive letters written entirely in French. That is the opposite of what was happening 15 years ago in Ottawa.