

which were uncomplimentary to the French-speaking people of Canada. This individual sat at the table and agreed to the Accord to preserve—

Ms. Jewett: French on corn flakes boxes.

Mr. Riis:—French everywhere. I think it is an amazing step forward.

Mr. Berger: Doesn't it make you suspicious, Nelson?

Mr. Riis: No, it does not make me suspicious. It gives me a great deal of encouragement because here was an individual, whom I had given up on in a whole variety of areas, who had been moved considerably to join with his fellow Premiers to preserve linguistic duality in the Accord.

I am encouraged, but it does not mean that it is the end. This is why I am encouraged by the recommendations in the joint committee which say that the next step is to promote linguistic duality. Certainly I am a strong advocate of that, as I suspect all of us are.

I think I forget the other questions, but I hope I have at least made a reasonable effort to answer the points raised by the Hon. Member.

Mr. Waddell: Madam Speaker, I rise with some trepidation because the Hon. Member for Kamloops-Shuswap (Mr. Riis) and I are close friends—

An Hon. Member: Were.

Mr. Waddell: No, we are close friends. We have been in the House of Commons together and have agreed on everything so far. However, we disagree on this issue. We come at it from different aspects.

I think we both believe in recognizing the five conditions or demands of Quebec and the distinct society. However, quite frankly I think the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) gave away the store. He went far beyond recognizing the five demands of Quebec and made it so fundamentally flawed in my view that it is not worth supporting. I know my friend has a different view which he enunciated today, and I respect it.

However, I should like to ask him about something related to that. He is a westerner, and I am wondering whether he is familiar with the argument made by Don Braid, a western journalist, when he talked about the serious erosion of federal authority and how it would affect the West.

What Mr. Braid said was very interesting. He said that if we in fact give too much power to the provincial Governments and take some of the power which the federal Government is exercising to kind of equalize things for weaker provinces, it would affect the West. He even went so far as to say that in

fact the West could suffer as a result, and he gave some examples. I quote:

Westerners need to think very carefully about that message . . . If federal authority wanes and the provinces take on the full authority offered by the new agreement, they will sooner or later be left to fight each other directly when problems arise. There will be no federal mediator powerful enough to intervene.

Imagine what would happen in a direct fight between Ontario and Alberta over oil prices . . .

Imagine, for instance, that Ontario decided it didn't like a new program to aid grain farmers . . . It could simply withdraw, set up its own policy to help Ontario farmers, and demand full compensation from Ottawa.

Westerners would face competition funded with their own tax dollars.

Imagine too the fate of a federal policy meant to distribute industry evenly across the country. Quebec and Ontario would opt out in an instant and use federal money to maintain their advantage.

• (1610)

What Mr. Braid goes on to say is that westerners have objected to federal power because it has been exercised by this Government capriciously by patronage and so on. In fact, federal power is needed for western Canada if the federal Government is to act as a mediator because some of the strong provinces like Quebec and Ontario could damage some of the weaker western provinces. It is a novel and a very interesting argument. The Hon. Member is very thoughtful about western Canada. What is his response to that question?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis). Unfortunately there is only a short period of time left.

Mr. Riis: Madam Speaker, I am glad there is a short period left because I must admit that I did not totally comprehend the question. When I look at the Accord I certainly appreciate that no legislative powers have been given away. In terms of setting national objectives for various programs, it is clear that provinces will have to be meeting them to receive funding.

Somewhere there was probably a good question but I think I missed it, with all due respect to my hon. friend. No doubt questions are posed. However, having read most of the journalistic views from western Canada on the Meech Lake Accord, on balance they come out in support of it. While Mr. Braid and others point out what could be problems—I suppose what he says is possible—

An Hon. Member: Hypothetical.

Mr. Riis: And as my friend says, very hypothetical, we should be to cognizant of that. Again, this is not a perfect document. Constitutions never are. We have to see it in that light and be committed now to identifying ways and means of improving the Constitution over time. The committee has recommended a procedure to accomplish just that.