

● (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. C. A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the statement made this afternoon by the minister when he tabled his paper on the official languages of Canada. I can assure you that while listening to him, hundreds of questions occurred to me. As French Canadians, whenever we hear this kind of statement made by an English-speaking minister, we should like to go back to 1867, because that is when statements should have been made. Therefore, we are 110 years late.

The minister said, and I quote:

What the government is saying in this statement is that recognition of the equality of English and French as the official languages of Canada must extend from the federal to the provincial level of government if this country is going to continue to exist as a single and unified country.

As previous speakers said, one wonders whether before preparing this paper the minister or his officials consulted those directly concerned or really responsible, the representatives of every province of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, this government completely disregards the basis of Confederation, namely the respect for the provinces' authority. I feel this is a further terrible encroachment upon provincial jurisdiction without even asking for permission, and we have become used to it because ever since I came to this House, I have seen the government interfere by all possible means in areas under provincial jurisdiction without asking their permission.

I am in favour of the official languages, in particular when the minister says:

One of the principles the government advocates, again as the statement makes clear, is that Canadians have a right to have their children educated in the official language of their choice . . .

I believe, and indeed the minister states that we have nothing to reproach Quebec with in this instance. But shall we be able to convince, Mr. Minister, the nine English provinces to implement what has just been stated? They have been rejecting the teaching of French and forcing French Canadians to learn English for 110 years. That is the point and let us be realistic. We must stop deceiving ourselves. We must stop making fine speeches and trying to make Quebec believe certain things while patting it on the back. We have been telling Quebec for 110 years: The time will come. Because of what happened on November 15, some people are now afraid. I am also afraid, and I do not say this lightly, but because I ask myself the following question: Shall we finally be able to convince the nine other provinces to do their share? And now I would like to make the following invitation. We are all Canadians, and it therefore seems to me that we should put aside all our old theories and assert that we want a united Canada and that we must work together. We have been waiting for this for 110 years. In the early days of Confederation, French was taught in all the English provinces. It was French Canadians who opened up the western provinces. When the governments of the English provinces simply abolished the right to teach French, the federal government did

Official Languages

nothing. Let us be realistic my Anglophone friends! You did nothing to protect our minorities in your English provinces. Let us be honest! I would not want either to treat the Anglophones of my province like you treated Francophones in your provinces. I do not want that. It is essential to co-operate at this time. We are sensible people. It is essential to get together and put an end to our old ideologies and stop saying as some still do today, and as I have heard myself in British Columbia: Speak white! I will never tell an English-speaking Quebecer: Speak French! When he is in Quebec, he is entitled to speak either French or English; he is entitled to go to an English school or a French school. Have no fear, he is happy.

Some people are anxious today and they say: Let us not speak about the future, let us not speak of what happened for 110 years. We do not know what the future will be. I hope progress will continue in Quebec. But I hope also that western provinces will wake up once for all. That is where we find the secret for Canadian unity on the language issue. There is an economic issue but the great issue is language. We should never forget that. We will not have Canadian unity as long as we reject our minorities outside Quebec. It is clear. And I say so as a French Canadian. That is the question. Canadian unity would be impossible if we do not change our minds, if we do not try to do what Quebec did for 110 years, and certainly that is what we have to do. I should think the lesson has been long enough. We took time to learn, 110 years! You must not think I am malicious. I said that because I would like people to think as we do, to recognize the minorities' rights in other provinces, as I always pleaded for the minority's rights in Quebec.

I have good English-speaking friends in Quebec whom I respect as I have in all the other provinces, and I know that if, in each province—and I am talking about the nine other provinces—the members of parliament go out and start convincing the provincial governments to come to their senses and become more humanitarian and actually feel what Canadian unity means, it is then that we will have really started working towards unity. You will see then that we can respect each other. I bear no hard feelings toward English-speaking Canadians nor toward any other ethnic group, but I think that they have been educated in a certain pattern and we have been raised in a different one.

To be more practical, I would like the members of this House to agree on something once and for all: That from now on, as members of this House, we will defend the rights of the minorities and that we recognize that there are two founding people in Canada and that there are two official languages. This has just been reiterated, and I would ask all members, if they want to be honest, if they want to be sincere, if they love their country and if they care for its unity to make this understood by the other governments. And I tell you that if we do not succeed, then I will question the meaning of Canadian unity to which I aspire so wholeheartedly.

That is the appeal which I wanted to make this afternoon. If I have the opportunity of dealing once again with this issue, I will talk about the subject of economic agreements. I recently read a study on all the federal-provincial conferences that have