

*Official Languages*

Now, that excerpt from the opening statement by the Quebec government, referred as it happened to Bill C-120 now before us.

And in the same statement by the Quebec government, on the question of bilingualism of course, here is what I find:

But that cannot solve the whole problem. Essentially, French Canadians want to be themselves and develop normally as any other race, in the province of Quebec and in the other areas of Canada.

I quote this statement in answer to some hon. members, some English-speaking Canadians who suggest that the Quebec premier, when he attended the federal-provincial conference here, has some reservations concerning Bill C-120. The Quebec premier recognized the principle of the bill, but the reservations which he stated dealt with the establishment of bilingual districts in the province and throughout Canada.

I repeat what I said at the beginning. If the Minister of Justice has met with the Quebec premier and has reached an agreement as to the form of the proposed amendments, I think that the latter, if he is satisfied, will have no other reason to object if Bill C-120 becomes law.

Mr. Speaker, French Canadians, as we know, have never been inclined to apply for positions in the Public Service, because for too long no account was taken of that principle on which Confederation was founded, namely that English and French were the two official languages and were to be considered equal, so much so that the Fathers of Confederation thought of including a special provision—section 133—to ensure the respect of French and English in federal parliamentary institutions and in Quebec's parliamentary system.

We hear objections that I find very insignificant, to the effect that the bill is not constitutional. I say that if we take the time to consider all such objections, we will never build a bilingual and bicultural Canada, because the bill before us is a political instrument. Canadians will need to develop bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada.

I was saying, Mr. Speaker that for too long French Canadians were not inclined to apply for jobs in the federal civil service on account of its prevailing unilingualism.

The French Canadians who came here had to learn English before they could secure any employment. For too long, the federal civil service has been unilingual and that is what has kept French Canadians away from the [Mr. Asselin.]

executive positions they otherwise could have held.

It may be useful to add that Canada is actually at a turning point of its history. The tides of contestation are mounting against the federal government because there is unrest in the French-Canadian community; it is frustrated in its efforts to be understood and admitted as a full partner within confederation. If, unfortunately, there are extremists and separatists in Quebec, some are also to be found in the English provinces. To hear some English-speaking people in other provinces bring up constantly the victory of the plains of Abraham, one wonders if they are really working for Canadian unity.

If we condemn Quebec extremists who wish to set up an independent state, we should condemn just as vigorously the people from English provinces who are still harping on the same string who are still putting forward the principle that French Canadians have lost the battle of the plains of Abraham and that might is still right in Canada.

If it is intended to build the Canada of tomorrow with such obsolete principles, we shall never succeed.

Mr. Speaker, the extremists of other provinces are jeopardizing the achievement of Canadian unity just as much as the Quebec separatists.

Naturally, if the English provinces are told that the purpose of this bill is to compel all English Canadians to speak French, or all French Canadians to speak English, serious objections will be raised, not only in western Canada, but in Ontario and in the Maritimes, to the passage of Bill C-120.

But such is not the purpose of the legislation, which is merely to give Canadians, both French and English, the opportunity of joining the public service and of being attended to in their own language by civil servants. I do not see any other purpose in this bill.

Mr. Speaker, if the bill is explained in this way to those English Canadians who have raised major objections, I think the objects of the bill will be well understood and accepted.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, if one considers this legislation as a means of enabling a third of the Canadian people to communicate in their own language with government services, a major step forward will have been taken to show that in actual fact Canada is a bicultural country where the two major linguistic groups may live in harmony and may work together towards the solution of the problems that the country is now facing.