

Official Languages

• (1620)

[English]

Mr. J. H. Horner (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help thinking of the last words of the speech of the hon. member for Hochelaga (Mr. Pelletier), who suggested that perhaps he should ask for good will and reasonableness for the sake of reasonableness. To my mind he did not start out as well as he ended. He referred to certain members of this House being of the age of the dinosaur and being like dinosaurs in their objections to the official languages bill in 1969. That to my mind did not indicate a desire for good will on his part. I regretted having to sit here and hear those words.

The minister suggested that members should stand up in this House and speak about these problems. I agree. I have wrestled with this problem since 1969. I spoke at length on it when it was debated. I urged the government at that time to be careful and not to go too fast, because they would create enemies in certain parts of the country while thinking they were healing wounds in other parts. They did not pay much attention to my remarks.

Many Members of Parliament at that time sat in their seats and would not voice their opinions in parliament. They would not voice the opinions of their constituents on the official languages bill. Liberal, Conservative and New Democratic members would not voice their opinion. They were afraid to do so because the party leaders were telling them that they had to support the bill. I take part in the workings of this democratic institution and the exercise of representative government, and I wrestled with the problem. I asked myself, should we speak frankly and tell this House what our constituents feel, or was the lesson they taught us on October 30 clear enough? If we are to be part of a democracy and governed by representative government, then I think one must speak as a representative. Certainly a member can lead his constituents, but a government that gets too far out in front of the people is not returned; it is defeated in the next election.

Some say it was the anti-Trudeau feeling in the last election that nearly led to the defeat of the Liberal government. Some say that the way western Canada felt about the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) was terrible. I spoke to a Liberal candidate who was defeated in Alberta. I said, "What was the thing that beat you?" He said, "The animosity toward Mr. Trudeau defeated me in the last election." Whether you like it or not, and whether the country likes it or not I am certain that hundreds of thousands of people in western Canada realize this is true. I am certain, having watched television on election night and seeing the Prime Minister shortly after the election results were in, that the Prime Minister recognized that fact.

Whether we like it or not—and we cannot sweep the question under the rug—the Prime Minister has brought in this resolution. Personally, I question whether he really means it. I was certainly pleased when the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) moved his amendment because it puts the test right to the Prime Minister. On October 30 many people across Canada outside Quebec rejected the Prime Minister and his party. Whether you like it or not, that is the fact: they rejected the Prime Minister and the Liberal party.

Why was that party rejected? Every person can give his reason. Certainly in some areas the languages bill was a factor, although it was not in western Canada and it was not in my constituency. Some mention was made of news-

paper ads that I had run in my constituency during my election campaign in which I complained about money from western Canada being spent in too many places other than western Canada, and I mentioned Quebec and Ontario.

Constituents have complained over the years about Ontario milking the cow, but you cannot mention Quebec. The attitude of the hon. member who just sat down was: Let us mention this. Let us get it out in the open. I did so in my election campaign and was accused of being racist. Well, I am not. I am not afraid to represent my people in our democracy. When a country fails to produce people with enough courage to represent other people, there is something wrong with that country, and if it is a democracy one can say that their democracy has been severely eroded.

What does the Prime Minister mean by this resolution? Now that we hear the government will not accept the amendment, I suggest it means very little.

An hon. Member: It doesn't mean a damn thing.

Mr. Horner (Crowfoot): Thank you for that vivid explanation. I have come to the same conclusion. I should like to believe in my heart that the Prime Minister really means it, because it closely parallels an amendment I moved when the languages bill was being debated. The Prime Minister has brought in the resolution in the hope that he can get a unanimous vote of support from the House of Commons so that once and for all the language question will be settled. He said that. I quote from an article by Peter Desbarats. According to him, the Prime Minister said:

The struggle for the recognition of the "French fact" from sea to sea is not over, the battle is not won, and I propose to make certain that the question is well debated in the next election.

I think if he does that he will be taking a pretty dangerous gamble. He has brought this resolution in to try to shore up confidence in the government in areas outside Quebec. He is asking those areas to trust him in his application of the language question. Yet he really does not mean it.

Whether you like it or not, Canada started out as a nation after three constitutional conferences. Anyone who reads history can read the reports of those constitutional conferences. Language was not the important question in those days. Perhaps it should have been, but apparently it was not. Some provinces had already existed for some time. At the time of the constitutional conference of 1867, Nova Scotia, for example, was 109 years old. True, western Canada really had not been born. Some have said that this country is a marriage between the French and the English. We in the west wonder what we are. Are we a child of that marriage? We are not. We want to feel that we can play a full and equal part in this country of ours as an equal offspring of that marriage.

The Prime Minister has said that less than 10 per cent of the civil service is bilingual. He said it was 25,000 people out of 370,000, I think. The sad part today is that they are all at the top. Whether you like it or not, you will find, as I have found from my research, that instead of more French being taught in western Canada, less is taught. I said in the languages debate four years ago that if we want to make Canada a bilingual country we are going about it the wrong way. Otherwise, I said, we would create bitterness. I said the way to do it was through education. Education must come first, not afterwards.