

National Unity

Mr. McGrath:—they could not doubt for a moment the position of the official opposition. The record will reflect that this party has not only supported the official languages policy but has in fact been in the forefront of those who would advocate the implementation of an official languages policy for Canada. What we quarrel with is not the policy but the implementation of the policy.

● (1830)

There has to be something wrong with an Official Languages Act which, according to the figures for 1974-75, is costing the country \$105 million. That is not a very big price to pay, of course, but there has to be something wrong when we cannot get a ministerial statement to the House printed in two official languages.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. McGrath: We saw what happened today. It would be easy to pass over it, but let the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie), with the substantial expenditures he has to support him in this House, explain to the House, to the Social Credit Party, and to the unilingual members in this House, why he would have to come before the House with a statement in only one language. I would look forward to hearing him explain that in the House at the earliest possible moment.

I quarrel with a language policy that would deny children in my province the right to learn the second language of this country, the right to be enriched by French culture, because it is to be enriched to have access to it.

My children attend school in the city of Ottawa and they are bilingual. I am proud of that because another world is open to them. Not only are they better Canadians but they can enjoy a much wider and enriching experience of the world. They are bilingual because they were able to take advantage of a French immersion program that was funded, albeit as an experiment, by this government in the city of Ottawa. If they had been going to school in St. John's, Newfoundland, they would not have had that opportunity as the children living there do not have it.

Let us look at what we are getting for \$100 million. Does it provide French immersion to the towns and villages of this country where only one language is spoken? Failure to do that is to deny children in Newfoundland equality of opportunity in this country. If they opt for a career in the Public Service they know they could not get beyond the local level because no opportunity is open to them in a unilingual province to learn French so that they could have the same opportunities as Canadians in other parts of the country.

An hon. Member: Ask Frank Moores about it.

Mr. McGrath: Let me tell the hon. member something about the government of Newfoundland that he does not know. Today our province is in debt to the extent that it can no

[Mr. McGrath.]

longer afford to maintain existing levels of service because it has to operate within the framework of a policy that has its priorities all mixed up. That is what my leader is saying. The official languages policy is essential to the existence of this country but it is not the glue; by itself it is divisive.

What my French Canadian compatriots in the province of Quebec want is jobs. It comes down to a question of bread and butter, Mr. Speaker. Unemployment has always been a problem in Quebec, just as it has always been a problem in the Atlantic provinces. The curse of ongoing unemployment is a direct result of ongoing regional disparity. I can only hope that events will transpire in this House—and perhaps this debate will be the turning point—so that the people of this country will understand we must have an Official Languages Act in order to keep the country together; we must provide equality of opportunity for our French Canadian compatriots in Quebec and elsewhere, and for Canadians in other parts of Canada. You cannot on the one hand solve a problem in Quebec and on the other hand create one in Newfoundland. In my opinion this is where the system gets off the rails.

I should like now to address myself to the amendment before the House. The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. MacFarlane) said he wants to involve his constituents in this great dialogue. I want to involve my constituents too, Mr. Speaker, and what better or more appropriate way can this be done than by involving the parliament of this country?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: My constituents look to me for leadership, not to some task force that will perhaps report at some obscure date—I do not think it is even going to report to this House.

It is passing strange that eight months after the election of a separatist government in Quebec, the greatest threat in 110 years to the continued existence of this country, this government brings a resolution before the House saying it would like the rest of the country to involve itself in this great debate. Even then they had to be literally dragged in here to get that resolution on the order paper.

I say to the government that it can serve this parliament and this country by agreeing to the very realistic and responsible amendment of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) and strike a joint parliamentary committee to go across the country and hear from the average people—not just the academics, although they have an ongoing contribution to make, but the average person, the unemployed in St. John's, Newfoundland, the people on welfare, the native peoples, unilingual French Canadians in Lac St. Jean, Quebec, unilingual Anglophones on the west island of Montreal, and in the foothills of Alberta. Only a parliamentary committee has the heart and soul to understand these people and get input from them, not some high-falutin', almighty, all-important task force that is going to frighten the ordinary person.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!