

have an obligation to the people who elected us. Let us fulfil that obligation in the interests of the people.

Justice for the people means justice not only for majority groups but also for minority groups. The Indian people of Canada find themselves in perhaps the weakest position of all minorities. They constitute one of the most deprived groups of Canadian society. Their plight can be studied in the province of British Columbia in which 50,000 "status" Indians live, most in out-of-the-way parts of a vast and forbidding region.

• (1640)

One constituency in which almost a quarter of the British Columbia Indians make their homes happens to be my constituency of Coast Chilcotin. Large settlements are found on the coast at Sechelt, Powell River, Bella Bella and Bella Coola. Other large settlements are found at Squamish, Mount Currie, Lillooet and the Chilcotin country.

Early in this century the Chilcotins, like so many other Indians, were on the trail to extinction. That trend has been reversed since then, due to better health care and medical responsibilities. In the meantime, instances of violence and manslaughter continue to exist, and it is not surprising when one sees the misery, the alcoholism, the extremely high rate of unemployment and the lack of pride in an almost non-existent culture. This is the tragedy in which the Indians find themselves. This is the tragedy in which a once proud and resourceful race now finds itself.

However, progress is slow and the basic problems continue to exist. The government of British Columbia has taken the right initiative in areas such as financial assistance, education, legal rights and participation by native Indians in matters affecting Indians. It is time to realize that direct participation of Indians in all decisions affecting their development is essential, and that education must play an important role in their future development. There are very good reasons for the present high Indian drop-out rate and it is time something was done about this.

It has been my privilege over the past year to meet many progressive-minded Indians in my constituency who show deep concern for the future of their people. These are the people who have the capability of providing the kind of effective leadership that is essential to the future development of the Indian people. This is the kind of leadership that is required if Indian people are to participate directly in all decisions affecting their development. The paternalistic attitude of the government must be replaced by such participation on the part of the Indian people as a step in the right direction. It is my belief that we must focus our attention on the plight of minority groups in Canada, for there is no way in which a just society can be established unless we bring in effective measures to eliminate social and economic injustices which continue to exist in our society.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding my speech I wish to thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the House of Commons for the first time. May I also take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of the House and wish you every success in the dis-

The Address—Mr. Caccia

charge of your duties to the satisfaction of every member of this House.

[Translation]

Mr. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, each participant in this debate has opened his remarks by congratulating you and the hon. member for Stormont-Dundas (Mr. Lamoureux) for your election to the important offices which you hold. This however is more than mere routine. It shows a sincere conviction that the destiny of the House is in good hands and attests to the wisdom of its members. I so take this opportunity to join other hon. members who have expressed these feelings.

The Speech from the Throne includes proposals relating to almost every aspect of our nation's life and is in fact a varied and detailed program that has been welcomed by most hon. members. This response has indeed ensured the government of the confidence it needed to proceed forward and face the many and very real problems which confront any nation today.

However, what upsets me is awareness that some situations which should not create problems seem to do so, which tends to undermine the unity of Canada.

After 100 years of Confederation, the concept of bilingualism has found practical expression in the legislation of the country, and this due to the exceptional leadership of the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau).

I must however deplore the lack of understanding in some parts of Canada of the philosophy of bilingualism according to which a citizen should be able to communicate with his government in either of the two official languages. In fact, I find the persistence of this gap surprising. It might be less so to me if I were born in this country.

As all can notice from my pseudo Irish accent, I belong to the group of men and women who were born outside the boundaries of Canada and who deliberately chose this country to be their new fatherland. To put my thought in more simple terms, I am a Canadian not by accident, but by choice.

When, over 17 years ago, I was handed an immigration form to sign, it was bilingual. It should therefore not be surprising that millions of immigrants like myself instinctively sensed that they were entering a bilingual country. It was thus normal that we should consider that the controversy over bilingualism had been solved once and for all and that bilingualism was one of the values to be taken for granted in Canadian life. And this, not only in the text of the act, but also in our daily contacts with Canadians.

How can there be any hope of mutual understanding if we can only communicate through an interpreter? So long as all Canadians will not feel truly at home, whether in Quebec or in any other region of the country, we shall really not have achieved much in this country.

We must resolve this internal problem before we can consider dealing with the external problems that are in store for us. This is as essential as a close family relationship, when one has to be well prepared to face the outside world. If we are not united, how can we hope to sign agreements with the powerful European common market now that the United Kingdom is part of it? How can we