

National Unity

It has been said that people are judged by their acts and not by their words. This afternoon, I must say to the government members, and especially those of my province, how ashamed I am for our Quebecers. I think about the hon. member for Gaspé (Mr. Cyr), for instance, who was openly applauding the hon. member for Richmond and who I imagine reluctantly supported the government's attitude. I think about the hon. member for Hochelaga (Mr. Lavoie) who, until recently, I know, would not let one day go by without requesting that services be given in the French language and who, today, lamentably betrayed his own thinking by supporting the government. I am thinking about all those from Quebec who are shaming us, and the hon. member for Longueuil (Mr. Olivier) is one of them.

Mr. Olivier: Tell us why you have become independent.

Mr. La Salle: The hon. member for Longueuil is one of those who open their mouths more to interrupt others than to speak on behalf of their constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, I should be ashamed as a Quebecer for supporting the Liberal party this afternoon. Not a single Quebecer or Francophone had the right to miss this opportunity, my colleagues were right to do so, and it is this government which talks about maintaining national unity through bilingual services. The Canadian public must be told what happened this afternoon in this House, and so must Quebecers, and the minister of Communications. (Mrs. Sauvé) dared quickly support the position of her party which, I repeat, is shaming all French speaking members in this House.

● (1730)

And in that respect, Mr. Speaker, I would like to recall certain allegations made yesterday by the Secretary of State (Mr. Roberts) which coincide perfectly well today. He blamed the leader of my party (Mr. Clark) for expressing the opinion that the bilingual policy as applied by the Liberal government had become an element of division in this country. Manipulating the words astutely, as the Liberals are so wont to do when they want to brandish the specter of racism for electoral purposes, Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State tried to make believe that the Leader of the Official Opposition and his party were accepting bilingualism reluctantly and did not care for the official languages policy as an element of national identity. Mr. Speaker, I say that those remarks by the minister are among the lowest and most dishonest form of demagoguery one can imagine. When, Mr. Speaker, will this government stop cultivating those prejudices for purely political purposes? When, Mr. Speaker, will it stop those shameless manipulations to make Quebecers believe that Conservatives are anti-francophone and opposed to the best interests of Quebec? But they are not prepared to stop, Mr. Speaker, because the appeal to prejudices has been their favourite weapon for ten years. They know it quite well and it is with that weapon that division is being perpetuated, but that is politically profitable. And is it any wonder after that that there should be an aggressive nationalist feeling in Quebec.

[Mr. La Salle.]

We, of the Conservative Party, say that it is too easy for this government to want to sweep under the rug of a bilingualism whose principle we clearly approve, Mr. Speaker, but whose application we are rightfully discussing, all the monumental mistakes that government members made in the past ten years as well as all the problems they brought about and are tragically letting rot without ever solving them. Of course, bilingualism is very important, Mr. Speaker; we, of the official opposition, sincerely believe in it whatever the government might say, a government which incidentally came to get within our ranks the main opponent of bilingualism to make him a minister and its major spokesman for western Canada. That gives you an idea of the intellectual honesty and credibility of the members on the government side.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we fully agree with the principle of both official languages, as we have supported until now the implementation of the program, with certain qualifications, but we will not accept that this essential principle be used to distract the attention from the problems of unemployment, inflation, regional disparities and tense federal-provincial relations. The only thing that these tragic problems have in common with the linguistic issue is that they affect all Canadian citizens, whatever their language and their culture. Mr. Speaker, this is the essence of the problem that we are now discussing; this is what the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State should have been saying when they had the opportunity if they had not been concerned only with the need to worsen the language controversy to prepare their electoral platform for next fall or next spring.

Mr. Graftey: Explain Horner to the Quebecers!

Mr. La Salle: Mr. Speaker, this debate is the unfortunate and unavoidable issue of a deep uneasiness which was felt for the first time at the end of the last century, has since then grown continuously and has seriously worsened in the last ten years. At this point, it is useless to play on words and we must have the honesty to recognize that what we are now discussing is the future of our country. We have to recognize that what we are now undertaking is nothing else but the review of Confederation, and if our colleagues refuse to see it, if they find it unthinkable to examine the basic concept of the federative pact, I am afraid that we shall have in months and years to come more and more difficulty in understanding each other. Mr. Speaker, I have used the words "federative pact" quite intentionally, because it is precisely from the interpretation of this term that springs the lack of understanding which is threatening to divide us even more.

From 1867 until now, French Canadians always thought that Confederation was the result of a pact or an alliance between Upper and Lower Canada, between the two growing nationalities which guaranteed each other equality and total autonomy. It is under those specific and often repeated conditions that Lower Canada agreed to join Confederation and that Sir Georges-Etienne Cartier became its protagonist. All politicians of the time as well as all historians since then agree