

THE BILINGUAL SITUATION.

This much has been gained by the discussion to date of the bilingual situation in Manitoba — that the upholders of bilingualism have been constrained to admit that the law as it stands upon the Statute Books could not be enforced in its entirety. Certainly it would be impossible to have three or four different languages used in a single school, although, under the law, a demand for teaching in several languages could be made in the case of a large number of schools in this Province. Except in the case, of the defender of the right to teach a second language in the Mennonite schools, no supporter of bilingualism has suggested any compromise or showed any inclination to consent to this absurd law being recast in a modified form. The Polish and Ruthenian Nationalist agitators desire to continue to take full advantage of the law as it stands; having, at the same time, the assurance to express the hope that other nationalities will not make the administration of the law a farce by claiming the privileges which the law confers on them equally with the Poles and Ruthenians. These agitators want all or nothing; and in the present state of public opinion it is a safe prediction that — if this is to be the choice, it is nothing that they will get.

The upholders of the existing system of bilingualism are putting their faith in some very uncertain defences. The French leaders are relying upon the Act of 1897, the so-called Laurier - Greenway pact. Strange to say, the parties who now shelter themselves behind the Laurier-Greenway settlement are the very people who for eighteen years denounced this settlement, repudiated it and declared that they were not and would not be bound by it. Apparently their idea of the settlement of 1897 has been that any privileges which it conferred upon them were inviolate, while any corresponding concession on their part, stipulated by this settlement, was something to be defied and evaded.

If the leaders of the minority in this Province—and by this term we mean the clergy and those politicians and leading laymen who took orders from the clergy—had accepted the settlement of 1897 loyally and in the spirit in which it was framed, and had not themselves instigated and subsidized the Polish and Ruthenian Nationalistic movements, difficult a situation in this Province, difficult a situation in this Province, the political and educational conditions of today would not have arisen. The leaders of the French have made the bed upon which they will now have to lie.

The French and their Slav associates, in this battle to retain the present school law, expect to score off the Liberals by charging them with a breach of faith. They will say, quite correctly, that the Liberals, in the platform which they adopted in this city in March, 1914, and in the subsequent election campaign, did not pledge themselves to the abolition of bilingualism, but undertook to continue the law of 1897, with such modifications as would provide for the adequate teaching of English in all public schools of the Province. They are also relying to an undue extent upon some documents issued over the signature of Mr. Norris during the campaign of 1914, in which he set forth the Liberal educational policy as it was at that time.

It is their intention to charge Mr. Norris with bad faith. They will say that Mr. Norris, having secured their support and reached power with their assistance, has betrayed the men who befriended him in adversity, and is prepared to enact legislation going far beyond what was outlined by him as the Liberal educational policy two years ago. To these taunts there is a sufficient political answer. Mr. Norris did not get French or Slavic political support by false pretences. The Liberal educational policy of 1914, as defined in the party programme and elucidated by Mr. Norris in his speeches on the platform and in the documents referred to, was far too radical for those who desired to see bilingualism retained in the educational system of Manitoba. In the

succeeding election they were against Mr. Norris and his supporters to a man.

Although the Liberals had the support, in the election of 1914, of an overwhelming majority of the English-speaking electors of the Province, they were defeated; and the Roblin Government was returned to power by the support which it got from the outlying constituencies of the Province, in which the French, Polish and Ruthenian electors voted solidly against the Liberal candidates because the Liberal educational policy was objectionable to them. With the exception of St. Clement's, where D. A. Ross was elected by Ruthenian support on his own educational policy, which was far more radical than that of the official Liberal party, there was not a constituency in the Province in which the Liberal candidate was not defeated; and in every case this defeat was due to their hostility to the Liberal educational policy. The French, Ruthenians and Poles made it quite clear by their course in that election that they would not willingly consent to any such modification as that suggested in the Liberal programme of 1914. And it may be contended, we think, with a good show of reason, that the Liberals were thereupon freed from any obligation to adhere to a policy which had been rejected so decisively by the parties in whose interests it was drafted. It is, of course, true that in the General Election of 1915 many of these former opponents supported the Liberal candidates; that is to say, the result of the election being in no doubt whatever, they thought it wise to join the triumphal procession.

There is, however, a far better defence of any seeming inconsistency on the part of the Norris Government than the political argument just advanced. The Norris Government is in office, and is charged with the solemn responsibilities attached to the possession of power at this critical juncture in the life of the Province. The investigation of educational conditions in Manitoba, carried on since the change of Government by the new Minister of Education, has revealed a condition of things which, if permitted to continue, will make this Province, in place of being a homogeneous and prosperous community, a nest of warring racial factions. If this Government, now seized of the facts, with the added illumination thrown by the conflagration in Europe upon the folly of encouraging alien nationalism, were to decline to take the course which the public safety of the Province demands out of a too-sensitive consideration for the verbiage of engagements made under entirely different conditions, it would be a Government which would fail to measure up to its high responsibilities.

However, in our judgment, there are no sufficient grounds for a charge of inconsistency against Mr. Norris and his colleagues. It is beyond question that the cardinal fact in the Liberal educational policy was that English was to be adequately taught in every public school in the Province; that is to say, that English was to be the language of instruction. Bilingualism was only to be tolerated in so far as it could be subordinated to the prime necessity of teaching English adequately to children of non-English stock. In view of all that is now known of the bilingual situation in Manitoba, it is quite clear that, at any rate in the one-room, no-grade schools in the rural parts of Manitoba, it is impossible to continue bilingual teaching and, at the same time, impart a complete idiomatic knowledge of the English tongue. The pupil must give up his whole time to the study of English, with possibly an exception in favor of teaching a second tongue where the conditions are propitious, under regulations drafted by the Department of Education and carefully administered by its officials.

The possibility that it might be necessary to amend the existing school law in order to attain the desired object was, apparently, present at all times in the mind of the Liberal leader and was given frank expression to by him in the address delivered in this city on Nov. 11, 1913, which was the programme speech with which he inaugurated the campaign which ultimately destroyed the Roblin Government. In the course of this speech, which was delivered to the Winnipeg Liberal Association, Mr. Norris made these references to bilingualism:

"I now come to a phase of the situation problem which is exciting—and justly—a great deal of concern on the part of those who have at heart the interests of the province. I refer to the bilingual provisions of the school act. I have read with some care Sir Rodmond Roblin's remarks on this subject at Minnedosa. They are not very easy to follow. Apparently he thinks that the bilingual provisions of the Public Schools Act are just and right, but that the Liberals are nevertheless to be censured for adding them to the school law of 1897.

"Dealing first with the question of responsibility, it is true that the Liberals passed the bilingual amendments to the school act in 1897. It is equally true that Sir Rodmond Roblin, who has been in control of the legislature for thirteen consecutive sessions, has neither repealed nor modified any of these provisions. He therefore must

take full responsibility for the act, as it appears on the statute book today. This does not mean that the Liberals have not themselves to bear, too, a measure of responsibility.

"It is safe to say that the law in its present form would not have been enacted in 1897, had the future been foreseen. The idea of those who drafted these provisions was that it would give the French—who, with some show of right, lay claim for special consideration in this matter—a legal right to bilingual instruction; and that a number of German schools would also avail themselves of the right for a limited period of time. It was not foreseen that Manitoba was to become the home of large numbers of immigrants from almost every nation in continental Europe. The coming of these people, and their claim to exercise on their behalf the provisions of the law of 1897—a claim made with the approval, if not at the suggestion of the Provincial Government, in pursuit of supposed political advantage—has created a problem of great complexity and difficulty which the Government of today should be considering and dealing with instead of hiding behind the legislature of 1897, which could not foresee the conditions which have developed in this Province.

"The bilingual law gives any 10 children speaking a common tongue, in attendance at a school—and under the Coldwell amendments, it must not be forgotten, every room is now a school—the legal right to demand instruction in their own tongue in addition to English. There are places in the province where any attempt to enforce the law would reduce our educational system to chaos. Take this city of Winnipeg, for instance. There are school rooms in the public schools where, under the law as it stands, instruction could be demanded—and the demand enforced in the courts—in at least three languages in addition to English. There are settlements in the country, where three or four nationalities are represented in almost equal strength upon the school register. To bring into such a school bilingual teaching by which one of the non-English tongues would be given special consideration, would be to disrupt the school. It must therefore be recognized that in many places in this Province the bilingual rights conferred by statute cannot be exercised without creating conditions which would have to be dealt with by legislation.

"Where there is a school made up of non-English children of the same race and language, the circumstances make possible the operation of a bilingual school within the terms of the act. Unfortunately, in most cases such a school is bilingual only in name. It is a one-language school; and that language is not English. Instruction is given in the native tongue of the teacher and the pupils; school conversations are carried on in the same language; and English is taught as a text-book subject. No actual working knowledge of English can be acquired by these means. The children learn to read English in a fashion; but they do not really know the language and cannot speak it. These schools are race schools, often more devoted to encouraging racial ideals than to the developing of a broad Canadianism that would enable these boys and girls in after life to meet Canadians of other races on equal terms.

"Now, I am not prepared with any ready-made panacea to cure this situation. Some people think that legislation is a cure-all. That to pass a law is all that is necessary to uproot a deep-seated evil. It is probable that in dealing with these conditions, legislation amending, and changing the existing law will be necessary. But more important than all is to have a clear-cut policy and a well-defined objective, behind which will be exerted the constant, steady pressure of the Government of the country. The Liberals of Manitoba have such a policy. I can tell you what it is in a word. It is the policy of teaching English to every child who goes to school in Manitoba, giving him a thorough grounding in it, so that he can read it, write it and speak it.

"This is the end we have in view; and if given power we will achieve it, whatever the difficulties which may have to be surmounted. If it involves the re-casting of the law as it stands, this will be done. If it calls for great—even immense—expenditures for establishing and equipping suitable schools and supplying them with competent teachers, the outlay will be made. The whole future of this Province is involved—it is not a time to count the cost.

"It is the duty of the Government to provide thorough adequate training schools, a sufficient supply of competent teachers, and thus ensure under proper regulations that pupils in every school in the Province shall receive a thorough English education.

"In taking this position we reflect on no other language, upon no other race. We are not bigoted in our devotion to English; we are not prejudiced against the languages which are spoken by our citizens of foreign extraction; we do not propose to taboo their employment in the school room if they do not conflict with the study of English. Our position is based upon considerations of business and national well-being. For a long time to come many languages will be spoken in the Canadian west; but it is necessary, as everyone must see, that there should be one common language which shall serve as a means of communication between all these races—English, French, German, Ruthenian, Scandinavian, Russian, Italian and others. That language must of necessity be English. I cannot believe that a single intelligent foreigner in Manitoba will object to the State making due provision for giving his children an education in English which will enable them to take part in the full life of western Canada. The child who knows only his mother tongue will be tied to the settlement in which he was born; but to know, not only his own tongue but English as well, will be to open to him all the opportunities of this great country, and to make him, what he doubtless desires to become, a Canadian."

To re-read this speech now, in the light of all that has happened in the two years since it was delivered, is to get an added impression of Mr. Norris's qualities as a public man—his presence, his clarity of thought, his courage in avowing his convictions at the cost of temporary unpopularity. This speech gave great offence at that time in certain quarters, and was used effectively against the Liberal leader and his supporters in every foreign settlement in the Province in the political campaign which followed.

The speech is now invaluable as revealing what was in Mr. Norris's mind at the time. He was willing to continue bilingualism under the law of 1897 if this could be done without injury to the urgent necessity for the complete teaching of English; but he was prepared, if conditions made it necessary, to recast and modify the law of 1897. Now that Mr. Norris is in office he finds

that his sketch of bilingual conditions fell far short of actuality; and the necessity of recasting the law, which he then foreshadowed as a possibility, has now become an established certainty. This being the case, Mr. Norris, we have no doubt, will do his duty.