

Oral Questions

Prime Minister confirm that he proposed to his cabinet colleagues amendments to Sections 3, 7, 10, 15, 31, 37, 38, 75, 78, 82 and 83 of Bill C-72? And how could he have done that if the Prime Minister was unaware of those amendments?

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I think this is an indication of the lack of credibility with respect to documents reportedly in the possession of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition. Inasmuch as the Bill is in the name of the Minister of Justice, if there are going to be any proposals made to Cabinet they would not be made by the Deputy Prime Minister, they would be made by myself.

All I can tell the right hon. gentleman is simply that this Bill has passed second reading and has received the approval in principle of this House. The Prime Minister has been as clear as anyone can be with respect to this very important legislative enactment to the effect that the principles of this Bill are going to proceed. There will be no variation from the principles of the Bill. If we in fact can clarify the legislation, strengthen it, and make more clear to Canadians the real intent and purposes of it, we obviously are quite happy to do so. So I hope the right hon. gentleman will not stoop to reading documents of questionable origin, but rather try to support the Prime Minister and this Government in the most progressive language legislation ever brought before this country.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): We would be willing to distribute that document this afternoon.

• (1420)

[Translation]

ALLEGED AMENDMENTS—PROTECTION OF LINGUISTIC
MINORITY RIGHTS—POSITION OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said he had seen no amendments. He even gave the House of Commons the assurance that if there were any amendments, they would improve the Bill and the legislation would not be substantially changed. That is what the Prime Minister said.

However, according to the Government's document, the amendments proposed by the Deputy Prime Minister would constitute a major change in policy requiring Cabinet approval, and would destroy the fundamentals of the Bill.

Did the Deputy Prime Minister inform his colleague, the Secretary of State, who is campaigning in Lac-Saint-Jean and telling voters to vote Conservative in order to protect the rights of French-language minorities... Did he inform his colleague that the Deputy Prime Minister was trying to destroy those rights, to destroy bilingualism in our country, according to this document?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I thought we were talking about serious matters, but now we see the Leader of the Opposition asking questions

about a matter as important as bilingualism, to try and save Gimaïel in the by-election in Lac-Saint-Jean. It is a sad commentary that a matter as important as bilingualism should be used to save somebody like Pierre Gimaïel in a by-election.

I said before that Bill C-72 was an important Bill and that it would receive the approval of the Government and the House, and that if there were any amendments that, as the Minister said, would help to clarify or improve the Bill, the parliamentary process was available to do so, and in any event, Bill C-72 which promotes official languages in Canada, both English and French, will be approved by this Government and by the House of Commons. And I am very disappointed to see the Leader of the Opposition try to politicize a question that is so important to this country.

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State himself is politicizing this issue in the riding of Lac-Saint-Jean, while defending the Official Languages Act, and with him his colleague, the Minister of Transport, with the "Masse and Benny team". In any case, the issue is already politicized. The Deputy Prime Minister's document demonstrates the complete hypocrisy of this Government during this by-election.

LINGUISTIC MINORITY RIGHTS AND SPIRIT OF MEECH LAKE
ACCORD

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, according to this document, the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada is trying to gut the Official Languages Bill which, according to the Prime Minister, is one of his Government's priorities.

Canadians have a right to expect the Deputy Prime Minister to protect official language groups in this country, but he has tried to drop the reference, and this is in the document, to "official language communities" in Section 38 of the Bill, and according to the Government's document, the suggestions of the Deputy Prime Minister, and I quote, "undermine the link with linguistic duality as expressed in the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord".

What right does the Deputy Prime Minister have to destroy the rights of official language minorities and the spirit of Meech Lake, according to this document?

[English]

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, rarely have we seen such a pathetic sight as the Leader of the Opposition of the country attempting to divide Canadians with respect to the linguistic rights that Canadians have.

Mr. Allmand: That is what your dinosaurs are doing.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: I simply say that if the right hon. gentleman does not understand. If those documents had any credibility at all and the Deputy Prime Minister had responsibility for this Bill, then that would be one thing. I will be