

Private Members' Business

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, considered in committee, reported and concurred in by unanimous consent.)

• (1320)

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Christine Stewart (Secretary of State (Latin America and Africa), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to report stage and third reading stage of Bill C-76, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 27, 1995.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3) I give notice that a minister of the crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at said stages.

The Deputy Speaker: Returning to Bill C-81.

Mr. John Maloney (Erie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the position taken by the members of the opposition parties on this measure. The co-operation exhibited here is something to be commended.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)

The Deputy Speaker: Is there consent to call it 1.56 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed in today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Ref.) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, and as the anniversary of the original Official Languages Act approaches (1969-1994), the government should thoroughly assess the way the act is applied in Canada by appointing some individual to carry out a detailed and balanced review of the work done so far, and reaffirm Parliament's commitment to a just and adequate policy on official languages.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today to begin debate on this private member's motion which calls for a review of the Official Languages Act.

This motion may seem familiar to members, and so it should. It originally appeared on the order of precedence last fall as M-107. At that time it was sponsored by Ottawa—Vanier MP Jean-Robert Gauthier who, as we know, has since moved on to the other place.

When Mr. Gauthier answered the call from above his worthy motion was dropped from the order of precedence. More than likely Mr. Gauthier and I have different motives for bringing this motion forward. The fact that I have chosen to do so speaks to the credibility of the motion and the widely held view that the Official Languages Act is not working as it was intended.

• (1325)

The Reform Party supports individual bilingualism but we oppose enforced bilingualism as dictated by the Official Languages Act. We would replace the Official Languages Act with legislation reflecting the philosophy of territorial bilingualism. We believe the primary responsibility for language and culture should rest with the provinces. Parliament and other key federal government institutions would continue to offer bilingual services.

Why do I say the act is not working? A quick look at the Commissioner of Official Languages 1994 annual report provides us with some insight into this claim. According to the commissioner our audits showed that French does not have equitable status as a language of work in the national capital region. He went on to say the shortcomings are essentially the same in Quebec and in Ontario.

[Translation]

This is what our present commissioner had to say about the act. A look back reveals that his predecessors shared a similar point of view. Former commissioner D'Iberville Fortier said: "It seems to me that we are clearly not at the point where we can claim to have translated the act into action in a manner that is judicious, consistent and unequivocal".

In a similar vein, former commissioner Max Yalden accused the government of being inconsistent, unimaginative and indiscriminate in its implementation of the act.

[English]

The first Commissioner of Official Languages, Keith Spicer, was often critical of the government's implementation of the act. His 1991 report "Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future" clearly spelled out Canadians' view on the issue:

The view was often expressed that Canada's official languages policy has contributed significantly to the current crisis, including animosity toward Quebec and/or toward French. Frequently used terms describe bilingualism as divisive and as breaking up the country.

An independent review of the application of the official languages policy is badly needed to clear the air, with a view to ensuring that it is fair and sensible. Otherwise