

Madam Speaker, I should like to mention that a Prime Minister and a Government which so far have achieved so much will go ahead and make sure that Bill C-72 is adopted within the next few weeks. If I say so, madam Speaker, it is on the basis of the rather exceptional and extraordinary record of this Government and Prime Minister.

● (1610)

Mr. Boudria: Get serious!

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Desjardins: I can see some members of the Opposition do not agree. Well, let them answer this question: when we, when this Prime Minister campaigned in 1984, what was the central theme of our platform? Wasn't it "Jobs, jobs, jobs"? In 1987, we had figures showing that we created more than one million jobs in this country, 80 percent of which were permanent jobs. This was an undertaking of this Prime Minister and of this government and we delivered.

Madam Speaker, what else did we say in 1984? We promised to reduce the deficit. Actually, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) did quite a remarkable job with his strategy aimed at deficit reduction. Since we took office, the deficit was reduced by more than \$8 billion. What else did we say in 1984? We talked about national reconciliation. Does anyone of those who were yelling earlier have anything to say about the Meech Lake Accord, which is probably one of the greatest achievements of our Prime Minister and of this government? Another promise that was kept. Who initiated the talks on free-trade? Our Prime Minister did, because he wants prosperity for the people of Canada. Another commitment that was kept in the best interests of all Canadians.

We promised a tax reform and we delivered since it is being implemented. That means that the Official Languages Bill will only be one more addition to a long list of achievements which this government can be proud of. I am sure that Bill C-72 will be passed in a few weeks. It is a major part of our legislative agenda because we want our minorities to be proud of their roots and we want their members to be first-class citizens with equal rights.

Mr. Gauthier: Madam Speaker, I must say that sometimes the Hon. Member's comments surprise me. Generally, however, as Joint Chairman of the Joint Committee on Official Languages, he does his job and does it with great dedication, and he knows perfectly well why we are having this debate today.

Madam Speaker, I heard the Hon. Member repeat what a number of ministers were saying this morning about the business of the House, which was that the Government proposes and the House disposes. One Friday afternoon, at half-past one or two o'clock, the Government came to ask me whether we would agree to quick passage of the Bill with one speaker per party. I said no, this was not satisfactory for a Bill as fundamental as this one, as important as the Meech Lake

Supply

Accord. I felt that only one speaker for the Official Opposition, one for the New Democrats and one for the Government, would not be enough and would not do justice to Anglophone Members from Quebec, Francophone Members outside Quebec, Francophones from Quebec and Members generally. That is why I refused to pass this Bill in an hour's time with only three speeches.

I think the Hon. Member can hardly blame me for digging in my heels. He can't say we threatened the Government with a filibuster. That isn't true. We never threatened the Government with a filibuster. We only asked for a democratic debate where as many Members as possible would be able to participate. I think that is fair. I think that is democratic. My question is a very simple one. Since the Hon. Member is now aware of the situation and knows exactly what happened that Friday afternoon, would he have agreed—in his speech he asked us to explain why we acted the way we did—would he have agreed to pass Bill C-72 at top speed without giving other Members of this House a chance to comment? Would he have been willing to treat this issue without the care it deserves? Would he have agreed to expedite a Bill through the House, to ram it through in a hurry to avoid any possible controversy? I hardly think so, but I am asking him just the same. Quite frankly, would the Hon. Member have agreed to let this Bill be passed with three speakers and an hour's debate on a Friday afternoon?

Mr. Desjardins: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) for his comment and question.

The question is addressed to me. I would rather ask those groups concerned across the country. In the final analysis, they are the ones, I believe, who will voice their opinions, once they are made aware of the facts. And as far as I am concerned, their opinion is the one that counts. I must say to the Hon. Member that I am not convinced that these groups would have opposed a decision taken in the context you have just described, since they are not so much concerned with the duration of this debate, which may last several days if necessary, as with the resulting legislation and its implementation. And in saying this, I am sure that I am in no way misrepresenting the opinions of those to whom this question could be put. I therefore wish to see this Bill adopted as quickly as possible. What form will the debate take?

If you insist on hearing every Hon. Member who wishes to speak, there will be no end to the debate, in my opinion at least. I do not think that such a course of action would serve the national interest. If you wish the kind of debate we normally have, then I believe you will get what you want. I am convinced, as I have said before, that the debate will take place in the coming weeks and that it will take the form that the Government so chooses.

Mr. Grisé: Madam Speaker, I want to join my colleagues in congratulating the Co-Chairman of the Joint Committee on Official Languages, the Hon. Member for Témiscamingue