

Official Languages Act

official languages in that language as well. Perhaps I could expand on that by saying that I am a Canadian who is not of British or French origin. I spoke only German until I was almost seven and began attending school in Manitoba. I gradually underwent the inculcation of the schools of Manitoba. Although not unique, those schools were quite successful in turning many of us into a particular kind of Canadian.

In my case, I have learned over the years a great deal about the country. For several years I taught Canadian history to university students in the darkest depths of interior British Columbia as well as across the Prairies and into Ontario, at Lakehead University. In that time I have had the opportunity to teach Canadian history, think about it and come to my own deep understanding, if I may say, of the importance of official languages. It is because of that understanding that I repeat there is an appropriateness to our debating the supremacy of the Official Languages Act in this Private Members' Hour.

The traditions of this country are diverse. As critic for multiculturalism, I am keenly aware of those traditions. However, the traditions of this country have included, in a certain pre-eminent way, the great achievements of people who came from France and built on this continent and achieved great things in the fur trade, in missions and indeed in building an empire through the years of the 18th Century. It was those aspirations to an empire that collided with the desires of the British. It is between 1759 and 1763, with the collision of empires, that the traditions of this country began to move toward bilingualism.

We recognize the diversity of the native people and the aboriginal societies of North America. As far as European, non-North American language is concerned, French was first. It was in the last decade of the 18th Century that Canada became bilingual with the addition of the English-speaking population.

One could spend a great deal of time talking about history, but the important matter is recognizing the events of the last quarter century. I do not suppose there is anyone in the House of Commons who still questions the simple reality that domestic peace and political tranquility call for the establishment of two official languages and the provision of government services in both English and French in far more areas than even now is the case. Canadian citizens must have the opportunity to approach their Government and be served in either language.

Surely we can say that it is necessary for similar practices to prevail in a number of provinces. As a native of Manitoba, schooled to narrow views but learning broader ones through those years of teaching in western Canada, I regret the fact that Manitoba has not yet fully achieved it. It was not for lack of effort on the part of the New Democratic Government there.

I admire the achievement of making the Province of New Brunswick bilingual. I regret that Premier Davis of Ontario never took the step of establishing bilingualism in his province

when he surely would have had the support of the Opposition for doing so. If he had the courage at the end of his relatively long term as Premier to fight for separate school funding for Grade 13, why did he not have the courage to do it for official languages in his province? If that had occurred, I believe we would have a stronger case for pressing our friends in the Province of Quebec to establish both official languages in that province.

It is clearly imperative that we take action on these matters in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and possibly even farther west. I will not comment on the provinces farther east than New Brunswick because I am less familiar with those areas.

Much remains to be done. We need to establish and reassert bilingualism in the Provinces of Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. Much needs to be done in those areas to ensure that the supremacy of the official languages in this country is recognized throughout the regions.

There are many citizens of this country who come from other countries and have their own interest in seeing heritage language programs established. They seek Government support in their efforts to have their heritage language programs established within school curricula rather than in continuing education programs.

Those among us who are sensible recognize that support for heritage languages also supports the position of official languages. Many people in these groups who want to see languages in addition to English and French maintained in this country realize that the establishment of official languages was part of a movement toward the multicultural policy of 1971. As a member of the Standing Committee on Multiculturalism as well as the Joint Standing Committee on Official Languages, I do not see any conflict or need for arbitrary distinctions. I can instead see the two working together to achieve the kind of Canada we want.

• (1750)

Having made these comments in general terms about the situation, obviously my colleagues, the Hon. Member for Charlevoix and the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), who proposed the Bill originally, as well as I, would appreciate the opportunity to consider in committee how we can ensure that on the federal sphere the Official Languages Act will be supreme and that Government will act on it and provide the services which it still seems federal Government employees are recalcitrant to provide. Those are the sorts of things which should be before our committee, so I support heartily the amending motion put forward by the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme).

Mr. Bob Horner (Mississauga North): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to speak on the subject of the amendments to the Official Languages Act which are proposed in the Bill before us today and, more specifically, on the amendments put forward by the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme).