

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, July 7, 1988

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of State and Minister of State (Treasury Board)): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 106(8), I have the honour to table in both official languages the government response to Petitions Nos. 332-4693 to 332-4695 inclusive, 332-4702, 332-4704, 332-4709, 332-4717, 332-4721 and 332-4724 to 332-4745 inclusive, and I move:

That this House do now proceed to Orders of the Day.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada) moved that Bill C-72, an Act respecting the status and use of the official languages of Canada, be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to preface my remarks on this important occasion by recalling to the House what was said here at another time:

This Bill is placed before the House to strengthen rather than weaken Canadian unity. It is put forward for the purpose of making Canadians, whether they speak English or French, feel at home in this country to the extent that this is practical, and making federal government services available in the two languages.

Those are the words of the Hon. Robert Stanfield in the debate on the first official languages Bill to be considered by this House. It was exactly 19 years ago this week, on July 7, 1969, that the Official Languages Act was read a third time

and passed by all Parties in this House. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, as he then was, made the following points in his statement:

The purpose of this Bill is not to compel English-speaking Canadians to learn French, and vice versa. This Bill is aimed at providing French-speaking or English-speaking minorities with all federal government services in the language of their choice, as far as it is practical. If the purpose of this Bill were to impose bilingualism, I would oppose it, as I believe virtually every Member of this House would.

He went on further to say:

If this Bill is not administered fairly and sensibly it can very easily create more disunity than unity . . . The emphasis ought to be placed on the bilingual nature of the service rather than on the bilingual nature of the servant to the fullest extent possible and also to the extent that it is fully consistent with French and English Canadians being able to pursue careers in the Public Service . . . If we are to create a feeling of greater unity we have to think in terms of enlarging rights and opportunities, and not of restricting rights and opportunities.

That is the basis of this Bill, Mr. Speaker. That is the essence of this Bill. That is the statement of this Party over the years which has been carried out, developed and evolved by this Government under the leadership of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) to the legislation that we are now considering on third reading.

• (1110)

I want to quote some of the words of the Right Hon. Prime Minister when he was Leader of the Opposition, during the debate on the House of Commons resolution on French-language rights in Manitoba on October 6, 1983. He said:

Years ago, this House approved the principle of official bilingualism for Canada . . . It is a noble principle, one which is capable of enriching the life of this nation. By our stand today, we reaffirm our commitment and that of our Party given earlier in this same House of Commons by outstanding and distinguished Canadians such as the Hon. Robert Stanfield and the Right Hon. Member for Yellowhead (Mr. Clark).

Bilingualism is a valued principle and an indispensable dimension of our national life. The program, however, must be implemented with fairness and with equity. It is diminished if it comes to be perceived by large numbers of Canadians as an instrument of division or an instrument of unfairness . . . We must seek to understand these differences between Canadians and consider them not as obstacles but as guides to the elaboration of sensible and realistic policies which will enhance rather than lessen the attractiveness of such programs in the minds of all Canadians. Sensitivity to people and the presumption of good faith should be the hallmarks of implementation. They will ensure for bilingualism a more durable character and more pervasive acceptance . . .

The consistency of the position of this Party, of this Government, is evident from the comments I have just read.