

good and thorough examination of the Bill when it gets to committee.

Mr. Gauthier: You are scared of the Bill.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: That would be a rational way of proceeding. Unfortunately the Liberal Party still has a trace of that tendency under Mr. Trudeau to use language as a divisive force in our country. We are not going to deal with this kind—

• (1230)

Mr. Prud'homme: Madam Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

Mr. Gauthier: That is a cheap shot and you know it. That is the cheapest shot I have heard come out of you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Order, please. The Chair recognizes the Hon. Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme).

Mr. Prud'homme: Madam Speaker, if the comments which were made were made by a less senior Member of the House I might not have been so insulted. But coming as they do from the Minister of Justice I want to ask him to withdraw. I am a Member of the Liberal Party. I have always said that if there is any issue that is the most explosive for our country it is the issue of the relationship between the French and the English. To say to us that, intentionally, Mr. Trudeau or any one of the Members of his Party at that time was using the language issue to divide is not worthy of a Minister of Justice of Canada.

I hope that we can discuss this Bill. I see a lot of good in it. I have only a very few comments to make on certain chapters of it when it is referred to committee. It is the Minister of Justice who should set the tone for debate. What he has just said is extremely divisive. If the Minister cannot back up what he has said with proof then I hope that he will set another tone for a debate of this type. There are enough problems in Canada and enough misunderstandings. There are many problems in Manitoba at the moment in every village. I hope that the Minister will be more careful.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): It would be easier for everyone as we are discussing this very important issue if Members would be more careful with off-the-cuff comments and for Members on the other side not to be so thin-skinned in terms of remarks which are made off-the-cuff.

I would now like to inform the House that the time for questions and comments has expired.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Madam Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. Because my colleague for whom I have great respect has raised this matter I do not want there to be any misunderstanding about it. I share with the Hon. Member as fervently as any Member of the House the belief that this matter should be dealt with in a responsible and unifying manner. It is an issue fundamental to our country. I make no apology for that.

Supply

As a western Canadian and as a member of a minority group I understand the rights of minorities. This Bill deals with minority rights.

If we are going to deal with it in the way in which the Hon. Member wants it to be dealt with, then I would ask him to reflect and to discuss in his caucus this Wednesday with his Party—

Mr. Prud'homme: That is not a question of privilege, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Hnatyshyn:—whether this type of motion is in fact legitimate or mischievous.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Resuming debate. The Chair recognizes the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay—Nipigon (Mr. Epp).

Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Madam Speaker, we are debating this morning an Opposition motion which might be worth putting on the record again at this point. It states:

That this House condemns the government for its inaction, its lack of political will and its hesitation to accept debate in the House of Commons, at the second reading stage, on Bill C-72 respecting the status and use of the official languages, thus causing a clear setback in the application of the Act by federal departments and agencies, in addition to having detrimental effects on national unity.

That is a powerful motion. I can understand some of the sensitivities being expressed this morning and early afternoon by Members of the Official Opposition as well as by Members of the Government. I must say that I came into the Chamber just before the Hon. Member for Chambly (Mr. Grisé) made his comments and asked his question of the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) who moved this particular motion. He asked a question about the credentials of the Hon. Member. That struck me as one of the less informed, and I am tempted to use that good straightforward term "ignorant" questions that I have heard in the House. If a question could allow a speaker to lay his credentials out and impress others with what he has done then that particular question did so.

The Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier has clearly been working hard for years within the Government caucus, the Liberal caucus in the years past, and now in Opposition, in order to advance the cause of bilingualism in Canada. There is no point in raising any questions about his right to express concern about inaction and to press for action by the Government on Bill C-72.

I would like to say something about the context within which bilingualism developed in order to provide a basis for appreciating the importance of Bill C-72 as it comes before us for debate, presumably some time in 1988. Of course, the precise question is how soon it will come before us so that it can be advanced to committee for detailed consideration and for it to become law. The comments I want to address are the comments of the leading New Democratic Party Member of the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages, as well