

*Supply*

We have gone a long way since then, Madam Speaker. As we know, the Pearson-Lamontagne mandate and the Laurendeau-Dunton recommendations opened the door, followed of course by the Official Languages Act passed by this House in 1969. But there were shortcomings, loopholes in that great statute that have too often been pointed out by the Standing Committee, the Cabinet, the Public Service, the Official Languages Commissioner, and interested groups such as the FFHQ, Alliance Quebec and Parents for French. What are those loopholes? The 1982 Constitutional Act plugged a few, as we know, by enshrining, for instance, Government bilingualism along with parliamentary, judicial and school bilingualism. We now have that in our Constitution. Those provisions in the 1982 Act can no longer be changed by way of ordinary legislation. A constitutional amendment will be needed.

We know that significant progress has been made in the Public Service in the areas of services to the public, equitable representation, working language, all this is included in Bill C-72.

We are aware of the progress made in the use of official languages by provincial governments, especially in my own province of Ontario, whose Premier recognized during the election campaign the need to legislate bilingualism as soon as the situation would allow, and we all know that Bill 8 has been passed in Ontario and that it extends services in French to a greater number of people. This is why we must not stop there; we have to help move matters along. Now, a number of improvements suggested since 1969 have with much difficulty been put together in the new Official Languages Bill which is now before us, or which would be if the Government had the courage to call a debate. How is this Bill different from the 1969 legislation? What has been added? Why is the Government reluctant to try to have this Bill approved? Having proclaimed the principle of English and French duality, why is the Government reluctant to proclaim the consequences of this principle?

Let the dinosaurs rise; let those who are against the legislation explain their position, but let us see some action, Madam Speaker! Let those who are against the main provisions of this Bill rise, and I shall now list those main points. Let those who are against them rise and tell us if they are against improved access to justice in the two official languages of this country. Does anyone oppose recognition of the right of Canadians to work in the language of their choice in federal institutions? Let him rise and say so. Is anyone against full participation of French and English speaking Canadians in the Canadian public service? Let him rise and say so. Is anyone against the commitment to promote the development of official language minorities in Canada? Let him rise and say so. Is anyone against the principle of a court challenge when the linguistic rights of Canadians are denied? Let him rise and explain his position. Is anyone against recognizing the supremacy of this Act, which defines the terms of application of what the Meech Lake Agreement defines as being the basic characteristic of Canada? Let him rise and speak!

• (1140)

Madam Speaker, those who are against these principles should rise, explain their views and stop hiding. These principles must be publicly stated. That is why the Official Opposition demands a debate on this Bill, and hopes and prays that the Government will have the courage to call this debate within the next few days so that we may finally take action to deal with this major issue.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad that Bill C-72 on Official Languages has been introduced. We need this Bill. The 1969 legislation was getting old and had been found deficient in a number of areas. Among other things, a number of rulings cast doubt on its precedence over other legislation; it became imperative for the Public Service to clarify the notions of language of work and, first and foremost, the law had to reflect Canada's new constitutional and social reality. There can be no denying that mentalities have evolved and that the Act of 1969 has indeed been one of the factors behind this evolution. There have been others, Madam Speaker, but the Act of 1969 was the starting point of a number of measures and changes.

This new Bill C-72 is essential because the time has come for the Canadian Government to openly reassert its political will with respect to the official languages. The Meech Lake Accord, whose legal text was voted upon by the House on October 26, did acknowledge that linguistic duality is one of Canada's basic feature. All provincial premiers agreed with and endorsed this idea. My personal view is that it would have been better had the accord acknowledged Ottawa's constitutional obligation to promote the rights of linguistic minorities, the precedence of the official languages. This was not to be, and the Government explained that it had made an attempt but had felt resistance from some provinces. We accepted that. We will again try to convince these provinces that it is advisable, sound and essential that the central Government not only guarantee the protection but also the promotion of minority groups, fundamental as they are to the future of our country.

We simply cannot do without the Official Languages Act of 1987, precisely because it will reaffirm our constitutional progress and help obviate such resistance. The linguistic minorities must be given the means to fulfil their aspirations despite occasional resistance on the part of provincial, regional or other government levels.

Although mentalities have rapidly evolved, as demonstrated by the recognition by all the provinces of our linguistic duality, the fact remains that it did not occur everywhere at the same pace.

I refer here to the Piquette case of last Spring, where a Francophone member was prevented from using French in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Yet, that province had signed the Meech Lake Accord. We could have reasonably expected the Alberta Government to be more openminded and in a demonstration of generosity towards its minority, to have taken this opportunity to generalize the use of French in the Alberta Legislature, which it did not.