

strengthen its application at all levels of our federal institutions.

In a letter dated October 24, 1985, the Deputy Prime Minister reaffirmed to the Joint Standing Committee on Official Languages policy and programs, the deep commitment of this Government to the promotion and expansion of official bilingualism in Canada. I would like to quote the Prime Minister who said:

Our willingness to advance the cause of the official languages was evident from the very first weeks of our mandate, when the President of Treasury Board, the hon. Robert de Cotret expressed the determination of the government not only to retain whatever gains have already been achieved in this area, but also to improve existing services to better meet the needs of Canadians.

That willingness was also brought to the fore in the Speech from the Throne of November 5, 1984, when the Government committed itself to ensure that the equality of both official languages would be enforced, in law and in fact.

The Government is currently reviewing the provisions of the Official Languages Act in light of the experience acquired since 1969, and also to make sure they do not violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I can assure you that the many proposals put forward in the last few years to improve the legislative framework of the policy will be reviewed, in particular those mentioned in its fifth report to Parliament by the former special mixed committee, as well as those presented by the Commissioner of Official Languages.

I do not think that, whatever our political stripe, we could doubt for one moment the determination of this government to go forward and along the same lines as the Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) and the Member for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme). We are all working towards the improvement of the principles which govern this fundamental Canadian legislation and justify its existence and cohesion. If we as Members of Parliament from Quebec are still here today, I feel it is precisely because successive governments insisted that we should be able to live in this country and use our culture and our language, our cultures and our languages.

As the Prime Minister himself indicated to the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier on April 15, when the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages was tabled, and I quote:

Last year, Mr. Speaker, upon receiving the report, I set up a committee of Senior Deputy Ministers to deal with this problem and to outline an action program that would promote the development and expansion of Canada's two official languages and their use on a daily basis. I am pleased to inform the Hon. Member that the committee has submitted a report. We are now at the ministerial level, and I think that in the near future, the Government will be in a position to make some important announcements with respect to this second facet, if you wish, of an action program to promote official languages.

Of course, we now know through recent information obtained in the Joint Committee of the House and Senate, that the new Official Languages Bill will probably be tabled early next fall.

With respect to possible amendments to the Official Languages Act, the Prime Minister on the same day replied as follows, and I quote:

I indicated publicly after the last report that I would designate a committee of senior Deputy Ministers, which I did, to prepare amendments to the Official Languages Act in order to ensure that vital piece of legislation is strengthened and enhanced and adapted to new conditions and requirements. That has been done.

### *Official Languages Act*

The work is now at a senior ministerial level. It will go to Cabinet and will be introduced in the House at the appropriate time, and it will be of benefit to the country.

The Government's intention to go ahead with that important reform has therefore been clearly stated. However, the need to act cautiously on such a complex matter should be underlined. I understand the restlessness of my colleagues. Recent developments in Montreal have shown that we should never give in on matters pertaining to official languages—

#### **Mr. Prud'homme: In Kapuskasing!**

**Mr. Hamelin:**—never give in either in any other province, as my hon. colleague for Saint-Denis (Mr. Prud'homme) just pointed out. And following the example of my colleagues of St. Denis (Mr. Prud'homme) and Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), I urge all Hon. Members of this House to take an active part in the work of the Joint Committee of the House and the Senate. What you are asking us today, is to speed-up this reform . . . maybe. Therefore, I feel compelled as some of my colleagues, notwithstanding the respect and admiration I have for the determination of my colleagues, to ask this House to refrain from passing this Bill. We may be proceeding slowly, but with your determination and mine, the resolve of the Senate and this House, all together we shall achieve something far better than just asserting of the supremacy of the Official Language Act over the other Canadian statutes.

● (1740)

#### *[English]*

**Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon):** Mr. Speaker, I rise with pleasure to join in the debate on Bill C-203 and the motion that would refer the matter of the supremacy of the Official Languages Act to the Joint Standing Committee on Official Languages for study and recommendation.

I listened with interest and pleasure to the speech made by the Hon. Member for Charlevoix (Mr. Hamelin). I do not believe he noted that he is the new co-Chairman of this committee, and perhaps I can take this opportunity to congratulate him on that particular election. I want to thank him for his observations on the actions which the Government intends to take on the matter of official languages.

As a member of that committee, let me say that there seems to be a certain appropriateness in our addressing the matter of the supremacy of official languages in this, the first Private Members' Hour following the establishment of the new procedures in which private members' committees consider some Bills for a vote in the House.

While this Bill was not one of those to receive that designation, the motion to refer it to the standing committee may in fact give it that kind of possibility since it becomes a report from the committee and therefore can return to the House through that means.

May I say that it is with a touch of trepidation that I speak only in English, but there is an appropriateness to discussing