

Official Opposition and the Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), and I quote:

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.

Madam Speaker, after listening to the various speeches thus far, one cannot help concluding that the wording and even the credibility of the motion leave something to be desired. This morning, it was made clear—and like many other Members I heard this for the first time this morning—that before the holidays a proposal was made to expedite the Bill and refer it to a legislative committee, a proposal that was turned down by the Opposition. And for what reason? We are told it was because they wanted to hear as many Members as possible on the Bill.

This is no doubt a very valid reason, but if we ask the linguistic minorities in this country, the Francophones outside of Quebec, the Commissioner for Official Languages, if they would not have preferred to see the Bill adopted rapidly and implemented rather than to have a lengthy debate which would cause the adoption of the Bill to be delayed, it would be up to those who favour such a debate to argue their case and I hope that the question will be put to them.

This is why I am saying, Madam Speaker, that some form of discredit should be placed upon the motion we have before us today. One thing is certain, Madam Speaker, as those who sit on the Official Languages Committee know full well, and it is that Bill C-72 has become absolutely necessary and essential. Why? Quite simply because the current Official Languages Act that was enacted in 1969 had become outdated, it had become laughing matter and was not being adhered to.

Madam Speaker, we are not to blame if previous Governments were soft and a bit too lax in the interpretation of that Act and this is why we found ourselves in 1984-85 with a totally archaic Official Languages Act that had no real impact anymore at the various levels of Government and Canada's Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I pointed out this morning a few cases involving agencies or Crown corporations or departments that appeared before our Committee since 1985. There were more than thirty of them. Hardly three would deserve to be graded B, "very good" under the Official Languages Act. This is why the situation is quite alarming, Madam Speaker, if not dramatic, within the various levels of Government and the Canadian Parliament. As I said, Madam Speaker, this is due to the soft, laxist attitude that prevailed for some fifteen years in the implementation of that Act.

Madam Speaker, we heard this morning that they would rather have a debate where the greatest numbers of MP's could deal with the legislation. We were also told they would

like to see and hear Members who might oppose the legislation.

• (1600)

Madam Speaker, what I admire in a Parliament, a Government, is the freedom of speech, because it is wishful thinking to suppose that in a Parliament with 282 Members everyone would always agree on legislation. And I for one am proud to be a member of a party where everyone can express his own views when there is a real debate on legislation. That is what party democracy is all about, and it fully exists within this Government.

I suggest we had an example in this House some months ago, during the debate on capital punishment. We heard very rational debates during which one fully respected the opinions of others. Some people said they were against the death penalty because they saw it as a means of eliminating crime, while others, myself included, said it was no answer to crime, and in that fascinating debate expressed opinions which were respected and, in my opinion, that is democracy in action, Madam Speaker. And if there is an entirely open debate, as some wish, I hope Members of the opposition parties who are against that Bill, and there must be some of them, will say so.

The important thing for a government, Madam Speaker, and we did it many times, is to take the decision that serves the national interest. And when the majority but not all people clearly express themselves for the national interest—this Government has always acted in the national interest, and that is what it will do once again with Bill C-72.

Madam Speaker, what is Bill C-72? I think it is important to give a general outline and mention its most important parts. It might be interesting to note that Bill C-72 contains no fewer than 103 clauses, compared to the forty sections or so of the present Official Languages Act. It is worth mentioning the presence of a preamble in Bill C-72, something rarely seen in public bills, which only shows that the legislator has every intention to enact very clear and precise legislation.

And what do we find, Madam Speaker, in the preamble of this Bill? The preamble of this Bill is really very precise and refers to bilingualism in the workplace, to fair participation and to the federal government's commitment to enhance bilingualism, to support English and French linguistic minority communities and to cooperate with the provinces.

It is also worth noting, Madam Speaker, that the preamble refers to the important promotional role that the Canadian government will have to assume regarding the official languages.

The Bill then defines the three main purposes of the proposed Act. The purpose of Bill C-72 is, firstly, to ensure that English and French have equality of status. Secondly, to support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities and to advance the equality of status of