

Official Languages Act

opposed to bilingualism. I think he too, particularly since the position is that of the vice-chairmanship of the Official Languages Committee, should retire himself from those particular functions.

• (1630)

As far as back-benchers are concerned, Madam Speaker, I am not sure whether or not they could be disciplined without being kicked out of the caucus. I think, however, that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and the Secretary of State (Mr. Bouchard), who is responsible for bilingualism, should surely by now in a week have been able to stand up and say directly, not indirectly, that they did not agree and that they condemn those interventions which are so harmful to the Party, to our Parliament and to this country.

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the report stage debate dealing with the amendments that have been put forward by the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) and the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Assiniboine (Mr. McKenzie).

I find it rather ironic that after all of the rhetoric in the House over the course of the last few days the first motion we are debating is the one put forward by the Member from Ottawa—Vanier. Here is a person who sat diligently during the course of the committee proceedings, had opportunities to deal with every facet of the Bill and had co-operation. I thought he would be the last person to come forward with amendments at report stage, but that, I guess, is a commentary of what goes on in this House from time to time.

Let me simply refresh the memories of Hon. Members and Canadians generally with respect to this legislation. Bill C-72 was introduced by this Government as a follow-up to a commitment made in the Speech from the Throne, one which has been given substantial and absolute support not only by the Government of this country but by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) giving superb leadership on the official languages policy in Canada both as Prime Minister and while Leader of the Opposition. This legislation was brought forward on June 25, 1987, a year ago.

I suppose it is a piece of legislation that has received the most intensive examination of any in the course of this Parliament. It has been scrutinized and examined by Members of Parliament and by the public at large. Representations have been made. But when all is said and done, I think the response to this Bill by editorialists across the country and by people from coast to coast from Newfoundland to British Columbia to the territories can be described as fair, equitable and very much in Canada's national interest.

The Bill itself is a response to our obligation as parliamentarians to deal in a legislative way as a result of constitutional provisions. Language provisions are the most entrenched parts of our Constitution. We are a country in which there are two official languages, and it is important for us to have legislation

that recognizes and puts into effect our constitutional obligations. We come from various regions of Canada with different perspectives, but we are all interested in one Canada, a united Canada and one that reflects our heritage.

When I look at this legislation I think in terms of minority groups across the country. We have to be tolerant in the official languages policy. When we are not tolerant of any minority we are intolerant of all minorities in the country.

We have this Bill which I brought before the committee. We had a substantial number of sittings covering days, afternoons, mornings and nights. We were able to discuss in some detail various ideas both from the Government and from the Opposition. As a result of those deliberations we were able to come forward with more than 50 amendments.

What are the amendments with which the committee came forward? They had the effect of clarifying and of making more precise the meaning of the legislation. They were amendments which had the effect of making sure that fairness and equity would prevail in the application of the official languages policy in Canada. After all that is what our function as parliamentarians is all about.

We wanted to make sure, when we had the legislation, we had the best possible legislation to present to the people of Canada so that they knew in this area, as in any other area, that there would be equity of application, that the rules would be fair, and that the development of those rules would be such that they would be seen to be fair, that people would be able to understand the rules and we would be able to deliver on our commitment to make sure that, where there is significant demand, all Canadians receive, at the federal level, services by the Government of Canada in the language with which they are familiar.

What could be more reasonable than to have legislation to recognize that Canada has two official languages, that the country is one where we have a system established to ensure that the services of the Government of Canada are delivered in our official languages? I think the people of Canada understand that this legislation is fair.

An editorialist in the *Globe and Mail* described the Bill as magnificent because it is fair and does set in place reasonable rules. It is a Bill on which we worked together with all Members of Parliament to make sure that various points of view were taken into account.

We have heard statements made concerning the commitment of this Government on official languages and particularly the commitment of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). Let me conclude my participation at this time by paying special tribute to the Prime Minister in his role on official languages in Canada. I say, and I know that this will not be seriously challenged, that the Prime Minister has been steadfast in his leadership on the official languages policy in Canada. He has demonstrated his belief in one of the fundamental principles on which he as Prime Minister and the Government operate that