

[Translation]

Here is another document from the Library of Parliament entitled "Official Bilingual Act". It was prepared in 1988 by someone who was certainly not partisan, being an employee of the Library of Parliament. Here is what it says, in reference to the preamble:

[English]

The very presence of a preamble, rare in public law, is evidence of the importance accorded to the Act by the legislator . . .

The preamble specifically mentions sections 16 to 20 of the Charter, language of work, equitable participation and the commitment on the part of the federal government to advancing bilingualism, official language minority communities and cooperation with provincial governments.

[Translation]

That is what the government itself was saying, what is suggesting and what the Commissioner of official languages was supporting. We now have before us a bill the Commissioner of official languages said flatly and unequivocally:

This bill is contrary to the Official Languages Act.

Let me ask you this, honourable senators, regardless of your background. (Here is what your government said a little while ago. Yes, I do congratulate them on that.) Is it not time to act, to set aside partisanship and to act on a matter of principle?

The matter is especially important, I would say, for us francophones outside Quebec. For us, the Official Languages Act is of paramount importance. The problems we have stressed and will continue to stress, if need be, must be understood. Bilingualism is not popular with everyone in this country, as you know. Senator Simard spoke most eloquently on this issue, and I know how much effort was put into the last election in his province by the CORE group. They came in second, not the Conservatives, the CORE people. And what is their main goal? To abolish bilingualism.

People must understand our difficult situation. They must understand how much we, francophones outside Quebec, had to fight to keep our language. I can tell you that I have been a provincial member for many years back home. Senator Roblin was the leader of the government at the time. Each year, my colleagues from the Liberal Party would table before the House a bill to allow us to have French as our language of instruction. And each year, Senator Roblin and his party turned down this simple request to add the word "French" in our school law. We were denied that. It is only years later, not when my children started school but when they were in the sixth grade, that the law was finally changed and we were allowed to teach in French in my province. People must be made aware of these problems across the country. That is why the Official Languages Act is essential for us. I am telling all of you, honourable senators, and particularly my French-speaking colleagues who spoke on the distinct society concept yesterday, think about just how important this act for us.

[Senator Molgat.]

Senator Lavoie-Roux, senator Bolduc, and I will not mention senator Grimard, who is the sponsor of this bill. I am asking you, honourable senators, to understand the problems that we have. The Official Languages Act is essential if we want to maintain bilingualism in this country, if we want to maintain both languages. If you believe in that, if you believe that speaking two languages is an important asset, if you believe in the Official Languages Act, I am asking you to put aside all partisanship and to support senator Corbin's amendment.

Hon. Jean-Maurice Simard: Honourable senators, without repeating everything other senators and myself have said during several sessions on this bill, before Christmas as well as last fall, and even last week, I would like nevertheless to appeal to my colleagues from both sides to support this motion.

I can tell you I would not moved such a motion. I thought I had launched a debate, with the help of a few colleagues, on how to improve the way in which the right of francophone employees to speak their language at work will be treated by the future regional organizations which will administer these airports. I would not have done it not because I am one of those who give up easily, especially when such a linguistic question affects my fellow citizens of New Brunswick and the linguistic minority of Canada. I said to myself, if to this date no one has been able to convince my colleagues, anglophone as well as francophone, but especially my francophone colleagues from Quebec, perhaps I can suggest another amendment which, after the authorities refusal to enforce the Official Languages Act, would at least result in maintaining the application of the Official Languages Act in New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province in the country.

At one point, I had to admit that support was not there. Perhaps I failed to convince my colleagues.

As the motion in amendment of Senator Corbin has the same intent as the amendment I supported yesterday, and as it is before the Senate, I will support it. I do hope that other senators from this side will do the same.

First, it was said and confirmed that between 70 and 75 per cent of Canadians approved of the Official Languages Act and its application in federally regulated areas or in parapublic institutions, such as airports. Privatization should not so easily excuse us from not applying this principle.

Second, I remind my hon. colleagues about all the arguments we heard these past few months against our insisting on the protection guaranteed by the Official Languages Act. We were told about competitiveness, about cost saving for these regional authorities.

Honourable senators, I remind you that, even if we still have not gotten that legal protection, it is offered somewhat differently, through the leases. I take the word of two ministers and the word of my leader of the Government in the Senate, who say it will be done. So, cost saving no longer matters.

Cost saving is no longer an issue. If another minister or another government fulfills the present government and the present ministers' commitment, and maintains the same provi-