

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[Translation]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 66 deemed to have been moved

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES—REQUEST THAT LEGISLATION BE INTRODUCED. (B) CONTENT OF AMENDING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, on October 9 of this year, I put a question to the Minister responsible for Official Languages (Mr. Crombie), asking him when the Government would table its Bill to amend the Official Languages Act. In his reply, and I quote from *Hansard*, at page 243, the Minister said:

—that Bill will be coming in due course.

Mr. Speaker, now that the Official Languages Act is about to be revised for the first time in seventeen years, I may say that I am concerned about the Government's delay in producing these changes. I am anxious to see some action on the matter and have these important amendments introduced.

Mr. Speaker, since the fall of 1984 we have witnessed the betrayal—perhaps too harsh a word—of election promises, promises that were not kept. We have seen budget cuts and personnel cuts, and we have yet to see much in the way of positive action. I urge the Government to introduce its amendments so that we can publicly reassure those Canadians to whom official languages are an important issue.

If we take a careful look at the promises in the 1984 Throne Speech, we find that in 1986, in this Government's second Throne Speech, our language laws are something of an illusion for this Government. Mr. Speaker, I would like to read, and I shall quote verbatim from the 1984 Throne Speech: "supporting official language minorities and in fostering the rich multicultural character of Canada. My Government is committed to or... ensuring that the equality of the two official languages—so vital to our national character and identity—is respected in fact as it is in law." That was in 1984.

Mr. Speaker, this promise was assessed as follows, two years later, on September 4, 1986, in an editorial in the *Montreal Gazette*, and I quote:

● (1800)

[English]

"It did", that is the Throne Speech, "promise a fairer deal for language minorities. It has not kept that promise".

[Translation]

And now, Mr. Speaker, in 1986, the Government has announced amendments to the Official Languages Act, to bring it into line with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. After two years of doing nothing, the matter is brought up again. The 1986 Throne Speech says, and I quote: "Official bilingualism is an indispensable feature of our national character. Seventeen years after its enactment, Canada's Official Languages Act now needs to be revised.

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Appropriate legislation will be introduced in this Session to ensure, as well, that this Act conforms with the Canadian Charter of Rights."

Mr. Speaker, after two years of seeing the false hopes created across this country, and I know wherof I speak, because I belong to one of Canada's diasporas, a minority language group that is trying to put teeth into this legislation and that cherished the hope of seeing some serious amendments considered in this House. It seems, Mr. Speaker, that once again, the Government has made much ado about nothing, or if that is too tame for my constituents, a Conservative dinosaur has laid a figurative egg, because for us, a Conservative is a dinosaur. What can I say? That's what they do, and they don't have much to show for it.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think there is anything to get upset about, but there is cause for concern because this is not the first time the subject has come up in the House. There was a report from the Standing Committee on Official Languages, which studies such matters regularly, a report tabled a while ago, which contains all the changes required to bring the legislation into line, to update it and give it teeth.

Perhaps I may recall what those recommendations are. And if the Conservative Government is at all responsible, it will take the plunge and introduce those promised amendments.

First of all, the Official Languages Act must be amended to clearly establish its declaratory and executory nature. Mr. Speaker, I have talked about this in the House many times. I think it is pretty clear what this means. Let us give this legislation, in addition to its declaratory role, the executory powers requested by the courts.

Second, the Government could introduce as Government Bills, if it so wishes, and I wouldn't mind at all, two Bills, namely Bill C-223, an Act to amend the Official Languages Act and give it primacy over all other Acts of Parliament, and Bill C-225, another Act to amend the Official Languages Act, this time with respect to the institutions of Parliament, the purpose being to make the Act apply expressly to parliamentary institutions, in other words, the House of Commons, the Library of Parliament and the Senate, which, according to a century-old rule, are not bound by statutes of general application unless these include specific provisions to that effect.

Mr. Speaker, I would recommend this Bill as required reading for certain Conservative Members, because I think it would be a good thing to have this legislation apply to Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Parliament could put teeth into the Official Languages Act and give it the same powers as Section 24 of the Constitution, powers to provide redress in cases where its provisions are not observed, which means giving Canadians the right to go before the courts and state that there has been an infringement of their language rights. I think that is a very responsible recommendation.