

Oral Questions

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I think that the Prime Minister misunderstood the intent and purpose of the words of the new house leader for the official opposition.

[*Translation*]

I am disappointed with the Prime Minister's answer and I must say that for us priority must be given to support for linguistic duality.

Why does the Prime Minister not want to give priority to supporting linguistic duality? Does he not agree that it is the top priority today and that his amendment is not necessary for his purposes?

[*English*]

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we are in full agreement with what my hon. friend is seeking to do. Normally, when all-party support is being sought for a resolution, I and the leader of the NDP are given prior knowledge of it so that we can consult with our caucuses and our people and report back. I was not given prior knowledge, information, or advice in respect to the resolution that was presented.

I did indicate, on hearing it for the first time, that I generally agreed with the thrust of the motion. I support what the Leader of the Opposition is seeking to do, but I did ask for a copy of the resolution so that I could consult with my colleagues and presumably the leader of the NDP.

When we submitted the text to the Leader of the Opposition's office, the then whip, now house leader, indicated on television, and I quote: "But I think generally speaking we can support the Conservative amendment if they will change the words 'as expressed' to read 'as reflected'". We then changed the word from "expressed" to "reflected", thereby meeting fully the request of the Liberal Party. With that we are prepared, and I am sure the NDP is prepared to debate the matter fully, and to vote upon it to reaffirm this very important dimension of our national life.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised at the remarks of the leader of the Government. The Prime Minister has suggested he had not received a copy of this resolution. I think it was read out in the House two days ago.

If the Prime Minister is now prepared to move a motion, will he confirm that it has been put down on the Order Paper and indicate exactly when he intends to call it for debate?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, not only will I confirm my intention to move a motion and set it down on the Order Paper this afternoon, I indicated that yesterday.

I would like to tell my hon. friend that my understanding of the customs in this House requires that when one is seeking all-party support for a resolution, prior notice is given to the Prime Minister and the leader of the NDP.

All I am saying is that in this case I had no notice of this whatsoever until the Leader of the Opposition stood up on Monday and indicated that this was his intention. I immediately said that I clearly agreed with the fundamental thrust of what he was saying. I asked for the document so that I could consult my colleagues. We submitted a small amendment which was then accepted by the member for Ottawa—Vanier, and I understand that the leader of the NDP quite properly asked for time to examine it herself and submit an amendment.

Here I have a motion I am going to table which will meet all the requirements of my hon. friend, and which will give members from all parties of the House an opportunity to deal directly with the worrying manifestations of intolerance that we see across the country, not just in Ontario, but elsewhere across the country.

I believe, as my hon. friend did, because he has defended this concept for 29 years since he entered this House of Commons. He has been fully consistent, that bilingualism and protection of minority language rights is a vital and noble concern of all members of the House of Commons. I would never do anything other than promote that and engage the responsibility for that debate. That is what we are going to do so that all members of the House have an opportunity to speak and to defend this concept and, if required, to vote on it. In that way Canadians will know that intolerance is unacceptable. Promotion of bilingualism and minority rights is exactly what this chamber and this country needs.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, the best way to state a point sometimes is to put