

*Official Languages Act*

Madam Speaker—a commitment by the Canadian Government to promote official languages across the land, rather than the sole province of Quebec making that commitment.

But, you see, even though the Liberal Party proposed an amendment, that was not accepted. The thrust of the Bill now before us is to fill that gap, and I am in fact delighted the Canadian Government accepts the role of promoting that fundamental characteristic of Canada. This is very important, and although I still would have preferred to see that role entrenched in the Meech Lake Accord, I am happy Madam Speaker to see it in the legislation.

Of course the Bill is not perfect, but it is a stage we must go through, and that stage indeed is of great significance to language minorities in Canada. It must be stressed that over these last few years we made very large strides, and I recognize that. Being an Acadian from New Brunswick, Madam Speaker, I am part of that distinct society which had a very stirring history since the very beginnings of Canada's colonization. With our own language, our own culture, our own customs, we are quite distinct. And our language, our culture were not preserved without hardship and difficulty.

If I go back to the 50's when I was in school, those memories now make me smile. Of course such conditions as we had in school at that time would not be accepted today. Let me explain. When I went to school, I had to study arithmetic in English textbooks, also algebra and geometry, and of course *The World History*. We often had difficulties with mathematics, not because the subject matter was that complicated, but quite simply because we did not understand the language, since everything was received in English. So we had severe difficulties. When I go back and remember the way we were doing the reading and the words we invented because of course we had the wrong accent, the wrong pronunciation, I can tell you that we were making sounds that sometimes were unintelligible. But despite all this, we broke through and we went ahead. How fortunate that this no longer is the case. My children were able to study with French texts and text-books. Of course this is a great step forward, but a lot of ground still has to be covered. Everything has not been done.

This legislation proposes very major changes at the courts level, providing that the individual has a right to be heard and understood in the official language of his or her choice. And this is very important because although a defendant would have the right to be heard in his own language, the presiding judge himself was under no obligation to understand the language chosen. This was a major deficiency which this Bill will remedy. Yet, there is a deficiency in this Bill in view of the fact that the Supreme Court will be excluded. When we deal with this Bill in committee, Madam Speaker, we will have to see whether these provisions could not apply also to the Supreme Court. We know that at least the presiding judge should be able to understand both official languages.

We must also recognize that the amendments to the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages are also very

important. His increased powers will make the legislation enforceable. People will be able to go to court, something they could not do until now. I suggest this is also very important.

Madam Speaker, we need to consider this Bill with a non-partisan, open-minded attitude, and with a will to make progress.

It would be unfortunate if the debate on this Bill would reopen the debate on our official languages everywhere in Canada. I suggest that this debate has already taken place. We should not go back and put everything in question!

We have come a long way and this Bill is the end result of our effort. We should all strive for the success of this Bill by working together in a non-partisan fashion.

Madam Speaker, I am sad to say that when we hear people talk sometimes, one might think of Francophonie or even Anglophonie as a disease. Some people are afraid to accept bilingualism.

To reassure these people who are a little bit afraid, I could tell them not to worry. We do not want to take anything away from anybody, but we want to grant other individuals certain rights.

As I was saying, Madam Speaker, this Bill is not perfect. I did not want to cover all the sections. This is a job we will take on when we deal with the Bill in committee. Madam Speaker, I want the House to know that I fully support this Bill and I strongly urge all Hon. Members of the House to do likewise.

● (1220)

[English]

**Mr. Reid:** The Hon. Member for Westmorland—Kent (Mr. Robichaud) comes from a bilingual province and, even though he talks in terms of being an Acadian speaking French, he points out difficulties in making his way through life and reaching the great status that he now holds.

The Hon. Member was probably sitting in the House when the Minister spoke, prior to the Hon. Member having the floor. The Minister pointed out that this Bill was designed, to some degree at least, to help make Canadians all across the country feel at home in whatever part of the country they happen to be in.

Does the Hon. Member think that this Bill will alleviate the problems that he experienced growing up in New Brunswick in his ordinary way of life? Is this Bill not more related to the delivery of services rather than getting down to the level of person to person and people meeting in the street?

When the Hon. Member makes his response, I ask him to consider the most unilingual piece of legislation in the country, that is, Bill 101 in the Province of Quebec, and what deterrent does this have in making people feel at home in different provinces where minorities live and work?