

*Supply*

Why would the Government try to stifle the debate and ask that there be only one spokesman for each political party represented in this House? In view of the importance of Bill C-72, I have to ask myself a serious question: Why would the Government not want to have a few days of debate on such a Bill in this House?

I see before me the Hon. Minister for Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andre) who took up so much of the time of this House to discuss his famous Bill C-22, which is going to make large multinationals richer at the expense of low and middle income Canadians. I have to ask myself whether it would not have been preferable to take a few days to examine Bill C-72 instead.

I also have in mind another Bill, the one suggesting that Canada was being invaded by refugees last summer, a Bill which most Canadians have already forgotten. Why did the House not take a few of those wasted days to discuss Bill C-72? It had already been introduced. As a society, would we not have gained more by examining Bill C-72 than by discussing the so-called Refugee Bill, which has now been forgotten? I am certain that all Hon. Members would agree that Bill C-72 is more important than those I have just mentioned.

Yet, when the curtain was coming down last June, the Government wanted to close the session by giving second reading to Bill C-72. What would have happened then? The Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier would have been allowed to speak to this important bill, one NDP Member, the Minister responsible for the Official Languages Act, but nobody else. Even the chairman of the official languages committee would have been unable to make a few comments on such an important bill. Madam Speaker, imagine the scenario as the Government saw it last June: even the chairman of the official languages committee would have been prevented from taking the floor on Bill C-72, the reform concerning the official languages of Canada, all Members of the Committee on Official Languages as well as those Conservative backbenchers who do not support the Official Languages Act would also have been prevented from having their say. This may have been the strategy of the Conservative Government. Perhaps the strategy of the Government was to allow only one Conservative Member to speak, just so the other Government Members who were against the measure would not have the opportunity to rise in the House and express the views of their constituents.

I do not agree with the Conservative Members who are against the Official Languages Act, but still I think they have the right to be heard in this House even though I simply do not see eye to eye with them. Their constituents sent them here to Parliament Hill to speak and express their aspirations. Should a Member decide that his role is to speak out against Bill C-72, I will feel bad about his speech, I will go as far as condemning his remarks, but indeed I will respect the Hon. Member's right to say what he thinks.

Madam Speaker, we Members of the Liberal Party are not alone when it comes to questioning such delays on the part of the Government. I have here an article from the *Journal de Montréal* dated November 27, 1987 entitled:

Official Languages: Concern over Ottawa's procrastination

And that article states precisely the following situation, and I quote:

The Conservative Hon. Member for Richelieu Mr. Louis Plamondon explained that discussions were still going on within the Conservative Caucus concerning the objective and modes of implementation of the Bill.

I quote:

This is not a priority for some people, he said, before adding that there was no systematic opposition to the Bill in the Caucus. "There will always be debates, he indicated. Some will still be discussing when we have reached third reading, and they might back down our vote for this Bill."

Then, even a Government Member recognized that some of his colleagues were not in favour of this Bill, although he said there would be no obstruction on their part in the House.

However, it is important to note that the Government did back down not because more than one member of the Opposition wanted to speak but because the Government was concerned about the speeches of Government Members and not of members of the Opposition.

That is a legislation that may be of a very rare nature, in the sense that Opposition Members I believe, all those I know at any rate, support the Bill, while objections or opposition would rather seem to come from certain Government Members.

What caused that opposition? This is rather difficult to explain, Madam Speaker, but I would remind you that last summer we had here in Ontario a provincial election. The whole issue of official languages was raised during that election. For a long time, some Liberal MLA's had been wanting Ontario statute that would guarantee the provision of services in French. I was one of those, Madam Speaker, during the 1981-84 period, when I was a Member of the Legislative Assembly. On a number of occasions I requested an Act to guarantee French services in Ontario. At that time, the then Conservative Government declined, it denied French-speaking Ontarians that privilege to be served in their language, in their own province, where a large number, especially in my constituency, had been living for generations. In my constituency indeed, Madam Speaker, we still have the Municipality of the Township of Longueuil which, as you probably surmised, was the Seigniorship of Longueuil before the 1791 Constitutional Act. Imagine, living in 1983-84 in the Township, of Longueuil and having to ask the Ontario Government for the right to be served in the official language, a right that existed since the 1784 Quebec Act in that same area.

At any rate, that is an issue that we raised at the Legislative Assembly at the time, and when the Ontario people recognized the time had come to change Governments in Ontario—and God knows the time was ripe after 42 years, eight months and some odd days—the people elected a Liberal Government that lost no time in enacting a statute ensuring French services in