

answers to questions. I think that would go a long way toward expediting business through this chamber.

● (1240)

I suggest that when the government does make up its mind that it is concerned about matters of practical significance to this country, such as labour-management relations and making productivity as important a factor in labour-management negotiations as it is possible to do so under the circumstances, and makes an earnest effort to deal with the economic problems besetting this country, instead of concerning itself with esoteric affairs like constitutional reform and questions of that type—important though they may be under some circumstances—then the country will be much better off and there will be much less dissatisfaction on the part of the Canadian public with the performance of the government and members of parliament generally.

I urge the government, through you, Mr. Speaker, to devote its main thrust to finding practical solutions to the problems besetting this nation. If the government does this and demonstrates that it is doing it in good faith, it will certainly have no difficulty obtaining support and co-operation from members like myself in the official opposition.

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, first of all I should like to extend to His Excellency the Governor General our best wishes for a prompt recovery. I am convinced that we are all anxious to see him soon resume his official duties.

I should also like to congratulate you, Sir, on your appointment as Speaker. I am sure your wisdom, your parliamentary experience and your great integrity are guarantees of success in the task you are undertaking.

In addition, I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate two new hon. members in this House, the hon. members for Montmorency (Mr. Duclos) and for Vancouver East (Mr. Lee) who, although newcomers, acted with considerable self-possession, self-assurance and even with dash as mover and seconder respectively of the Address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, one cannot come back to the House and speak for the first time without pointing out the extremely important event that occurred last July. I am referring, of course, to the Canadian election which brought the government of the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) back to power with a majority in the House of Commons.

It is normal that, following a general election, many comments be heard here and there which are often original in their treatment but generally lacking in their inner meaning. I am referring especially to the remarks made shortly after the election by Mr. Marcel Léger, a PQ member in the Quebec National Assembly, who tried to question the mandate of the Quebec federal deputation. His remarks clearly were aimed at trying to correct a situation he did not like and to infer that Quebecers had not really given a clear and precise mandate to the Quebec hon. members in this House.

The Address—Mr. Ouellet

It is often easy to draw conclusions from statistics by isolating them or by completely disregarding certain factors. Mr. Léger was right when he claimed that the level of absenteeism was higher during the last federal election in Quebec than during the 1972 election. But there is something that is very important and that he overlooked and it is the fact that the rate of absenteeism in Quebec has remained nearly the same as during previous elections. It holds true nevertheless that federal Liberals have obtained more votes in 1974 than in 1972, that is, a little over 1.3 million votes compared with 1.2 million in 1972. This fully demonstrates, in my opinion, that Quebecers very clearly and positively support their federal representatives in this House.

And this in spite of the fact that the Parti québécois urged people to spoil their ballots. Rejected ballots in Quebec decreased to 133,475 in 1974 from 165,000 in 1972. Moreover, it does not follow that all rejected ballots were the direct result of urgings by the Parti Québécois because, as is well known, there are many reasons for rejecting a ballot.

● (1250)

In the final analysis, Mr. Speaker, the representation of federal Liberal members from Quebec cannot be questioned. I am convinced that members on this side of the House, Social Crediters, or even the three Conservatives who were elected, nobody here would want to trade their majority with that of the few Parti Québécois members at the Quebec National Assembly. In the final analysis, Mr. Speaker, particularly after the speech made by the Prime Minister in the House this week, there can be no lingering doubt about the role that federal Liberal members from Quebec intend to play in Parliament in Ottawa, and that will certainly not please Mr. Léger and his few separatists. I think that any well meaning French Canadian happy to live in this beautiful and large country that is Canada could only be happy at the words spoken by the Prime Minister who said and I quote:

Mr. Speaker, I will give a straight answer... the government maintains strongly as ever its official language policy and will pursue with renewed vigour the basic goal it set for itself when it came into power in 1968, namely to make it possible for all Canadians throughout Canada to deal with their federal government in the official language of their choice.

Mr. Speaker, that is basically the government option, the option taken by all federal Liberal members in the Canadian Parliament. I watched members of this House after the Prime Minister's remarks, and noticed that all Social Crediters applauded. The hon. member for Joliette (Mr. LaSalle) also applauded but I could not believe my eyes when the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner) was unable to react and applaud such remarks. I cannot conceive or understand this unless his mind was on something else, on some futurist and far-away dreams. He was probably lost in the clouds. However, I can say that since the hon. member's election to this House, we have witnessed an extraordinary change and we no longer recognize him. From the "Red Menace" that he was, he has now become the "Blue Angel". I believe that the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe should agree completely with the remarks of the Prime Minister. I think that the hon.