

*Supply*

This brings me to talk about the Official Languages Commission, the new Official Languages Act, and the programs of the Secretary of State and the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship, whose objectives are the promotion of official languages and the full participation of all to the life of our Canadian society.

The new Official Languages Act includes all the measures taken in the fields of education rights, bilingualism, the courts, and service language. As early as 1985 we were hoping to revise the Official Languages Act. The basic principle was clear: to give Canadians a tool to replace the conflicting approach of the Court Challenges Program.

On September 15, 1988 the new Official Languages Act that had been ratified by the government during the summer came into effect. This legislative framework reflects the philosophy of this government, which was stated in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister on February 15, 1990.

The linguistic duality and the protection of the linguistic rights of minorities are not abstract notions. These principles are embodied in statutes such as the Official Languages Act, and they will be confirmed and protected because they are enshrined in the Constitution. Those principles take on a real meaning thanks to the will of a generous and tolerant nation.

The Official Languages Act has two main objectives. First, to ensure the respect of French and English as official languages in Canada, their equal status, as well as equal rights and privileges regarding their use in federal institutions. Second, to support the development of francophone and anglophone minorities and, generally, to promote within the Canadian society and in cooperation with numerous others, the full recognition and use of French and English.

The new legislative approach is much more centered on the notion of partnership with other interested parties in the field of official languages than on a conflicting approach. This innovative approach shows a new spirit of co-operation in the promotion and teaching of official languages, as well as a greater will to actively participate to the promotion of minority linguistic communities. Indeed, this is confirmed by numerous recent achievements.

The federal-provincial co-operation regarding the teaching of official languages is based on a tradition that

spans two decades. The commitment shown by the two levels of government regarding the teaching of French and English as the language of the minority and as a second language gives Canadians the possibility of receiving an education in their own language if they are part of a minority group, to have access to the same quality of teaching as that of the predominant linguistic group, as well as to learn the other official language and at the same time to familiarize themselves with a different culture.

I am pleased to point out that this co-operation is more and more prevalent in the field of education. It can be seen, for example, in the innovative efforts made by provinces, with the encouragement and financial support of the Secretary of State, regarding services in such fields as justice, social services and health.

It is true that our country is going through a difficult period as regards official languages and national unity. We are all aware of actions such as the passing of resolutions on unilingualism by some Ontario municipalities in early 1990, not to mention the failure of the Meech Lake Accord. In fact, we can still feel the effects of those events. What is often difficult to perceive is the fact that behind this turbulence some changes more positive for our future were slowly taking place.

The decision made by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Mahé case was a breakthrough regarding education in the language of the minority. It provides that minorities have the right to actively participate to the management and control of their children's education and educational institutions. Even the guidelines set by the court regarding the implementation of this right should be beneficial to minorities in every province and territories.

We will continue to support communities that give themselves tools to create a healthy and dynamic social environment. The existence of Francophone and Anglophone communities across the country is not only a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian federation, but also an essential element for national unity. This duality gives us our uniqueness and has shaped our Canadian identity, just like the precious contribution made by aboriginal people and Canadians from other cultures to our pluralistic society. I remain convinced that this respect for our identity is strongly supported by a great majority of us. As a matter of fact, this fact was verified over and over by nation-wide surveys.