

Supply

Does this sound like a Party that wants to get this matter through with great dispatch as the Hon. Member has said?

We talk about delays, filibusters and not getting on with the agenda, but we all understand the parliamentary system. It is very simple. The Government brought forward a Bill which received universal approval from all critics and all persons who were interested in the matter, including the Hon. Member who has presented this motion today. But what was on the agenda when we came back last fall? We came back to deal with the refugee determination Bills, Bill C-84 and Bill C-55, and we were faced with a constant and ongoing filibuster by the Opposition. The Meech Lake Accord, an important constitutional resolution, was brought forward. Opposition Members spoke and spoke on that matter. I am not being critical, I am simply talking about the agenda. Bill C-22 has still not gone through. The Opposition and the Liberal Party in particular were involved in a day-to-day delay of all legislative matters so that it was virtually impossible for us to bring forward this very important piece of legislation. The record shows that the fault for that lies across the aisle with the Liberal Party which delayed our legislation.

I have said those few introductory words without casting reflections on the motives of this motion. I know the Hon. Member is very interested in the matter. Of course, I understand that he is a Franco-Ontarian. I think his time would be better spent in going to his political ally, the Premier of the Province of Ontario, to talk about the rights of Francophones in the Province of Ontario. If he spent more time doing that rather than moving this unhelpful and unnecessary motion on the first Opposition day of this year, he would be doing a far greater service for his constituents.

When this Bill received first reading in June, it represented the culmination of a great deal of intensive and sustained work and consultation on the part of the President of the Treasury Board, (Mr. Mazankowski) the Secretary of State (Mr. Crombie) and I. We were mandated by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) to review all aspects of the law, policies and programs relating to official languages and to develop a plan for a comprehensive review of this crucial area of our national life.

Soon after I accepted the responsibilities of Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada in the summer of 1986, I spoke to the Canadian Bar Association of my intention to promote the Government's official languages policy actively in regard to the reform of the Official Languages Act and related amendments to the language of trial provisions in Part 14(1) of the Criminal Code. The re-enactment of the Official Languages Act to ensure conformity with both the letter and spirit of the Constitution and the implementation of the right of accused persons to be tried in their official languages under the Criminal Code would be, I stated, areas of primary importance to me as Minister of Justice and important elements in the advancement of the Government's policies of social justice and national reconciliation.

It took 10 more months for us to perfect the work on those initiatives and to develop improved policies and programs relating to the use of official languages not only within federal institutions but also throughout Canadian society as a whole. We were subject to criticism during that period by the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier for the delay in reforming the Act and renewing the policy. The strength of our commitment was put into question. Yet it was the seriousness with which we undertook this endeavour that required us to review, study and consult in order to ensure that the reforms the Government would be proposing would be balanced, reforms designed to move official languages policy forward into the year 2000 and beyond, yet ones that would be fair to all Canadians and could be implemented in a reasonable, effective and practical manner.

To paraphrase the Supreme Court of Canada in one of its more celebrated language rights decisions, language reform combines legal and constitutional questions of the utmost subtlety and complexity with political questions of great sensitivity. I say unabashedly that this Government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, finds the matter of official languages one which goes to the unity of Canada. Unlike the Liberal Party, we use it as a unifying force and not for political division. The historical record of that party is blatant and unfortunate.

• (1200)

What was the result of this painstaking process? On June 25 the official languages Bill was introduced and related policy and program initiatives of Treasury Board and the Secretary of State were announced. I want Hon. Members and the people of Canada to understand the reaction to this legislation when we introduced it at the end of last June. I suggest that the headlines summarize the reaction rather succinctly. "Bilingualism Bill Wins Nothing But Praise", *Ottawa Citizen*, June 26, 1987. "All Parties Back New Languages Bill", *The Toronto Star* of June 26. "Minority Language Rights Get Boost", *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 26.

[Translation]

"Tabling of Bill in Commons receives unanimous approval", *La Presse*, Montreal, June 26.

[English]

"Language Bill Would Promote Life of Minority", the *Montreal Gazette*, June 2.

[Translation]

"The Language Act gets more teeth—Unanimity on reform proposal", *Le Devoir*, Montreal, June 26.

[English]

Here is a sampling from the articles that followed those headlines:

Opposition MPs and minority official language groups couldn't find a bad word—in English or in French—to say about the government's new bilingualism legislation.