

Mr. Speaker, while we approve of this Part as a whole, we have a few concerns. Under Section 10, it is theoretically possible for the Government to avoid signing its federal-provincial agreements in both official languages. I understand the arguments the Minister made before the Committee—that some agreements concern only one individual and that small amounts of money are involved. That is true in the case of grants awarded to university researchers, for example. It is therefore difficult to oblige the Government to sign all federal-provincial agreements in both official languages because it is not always necessary. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, five or six amendments that I introduced in committee and that were defeated concerned some very important issues. I cannot go into detail on those issues today, but as I said earlier, there will certainly be Private Members' Bills in the future on those issues, which include the Supreme Court of Canada and such important matters as the tabling of federal-provincial agreements in both official languages.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I remain somewhat concerned, as there will be a need for vigilance to ensure that agreements that may be important to minorities are actually signed in both official languages, whether the language of the province is French or English. It is a simple precaution I am proposing, Mr. Speaker, but in my experience both as a parliamentarian and as a member of a minority in my province, it is an important one. Without it, minorities will again have to fight and beg to have their rights respected.

• (1220)

[English]

I want to pay special tribute to three Canadians who have occupied the position of the Official Languages Commissioner, Mr. Speaker. I am speaking of Mr. Keith Spicer, Mr. Maxwell Yalden and Mr. D'Iberville Fortier. Their work and dedication, their professional advice to the Parliament of Canada in their annual reports and in their appearances before the committee speak highly of their excellent stewardship of this important national policy.

I would like to pay tribute also to my colleague, the Hon. Member for Notre Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand), who has travelled with me on the road to language equality from our respective provinces and from our different perspectives with regard to official language minorities. I want to thank all my colleagues on this side of the House who have helped and supported me and who have many times come to the committee to assist me in the work of doing the best we can to improve the language obligation.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Laval-des-Rapides (Mr. Garneau) and the Liberal Members who often attend Committee meetings to reinforce the Liberal presence and help to take stock . . .

[English]

The importance of language rights to many of us is grounded in our belief that Canada is a better and stronger nation if we care about each other's aspirations in dignity and respect. Languages can bridge the gap between communities and

regions in this country, as I said at the beginning of my remarks.

[Translation]

The official language minorities throughout Canada are the cement of national unity. Canada is strengthened and enriched by them.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great joy that I say to the Government: Thank you, well done, Minister; we have found in you someone who, I think, understands the official languages problem! I encourage you to stay on the right path. I encourage you to ensure that all your colleagues support you in your proposals and I hope we can continue to work together to improve Canada and make it a respectful, generous country and, above all, the Canada that must be ours, a Canada that will be respectful and generous to all Canadians.

[English]

**Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on behalf of my colleagues in the New Democratic caucus to speak in third reading debate on Bill C-72, the official languages Bill.

The day is a happy and an historic one. It is a day that I sometimes wondered about our achieving, given the lengthy committee hearings and the many witnesses who came before us. There was as well extended consideration of amendments to the Bill that were put forward in committee. It was very important for that process to have been worked through carefully to ensure that Bill C-72 is a good measure for this Parliament to pass.

I want to say immediately that Bill C-72 impressed many people at the outset in June, 1987 as being well drawn over-all. There were individual points of concern. I felt one or two of those at the time and expressed them, but the approbation which the Bill received at the outset from persons concerned about the policy of official bilingualism which was reflected by members of all three Parties and people concerned with the policy of official bilingualism is something worth saying at the outset. This was well expressed at second reading debate when the Bill was given approval in principle. No voices were raised against it. It appeared that the Bill had unanimous support in this House at the time, but more recently it has become clear that was not the full reality of the situation. There is across the country still some opposition to the policy of official bilingualism.

I am constrained in the time that I have to speak and envy my friend, the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) for the time he had to address the matter. I would like to speak particularly to some of the concerns that exist across Canada about the process, the Bill and the policy in order to try to set at rest those minds which still feel concern about the policy of official bilingualism dating back to 1969 and the first Official Languages Act. For those who are concerned about the implications of this Bill for Canada, it is worth looking at some of those concerns.