

fighting for recognition and implementation of the Official Languages Act, it is apparently quite simple to reverse the process and renege at least partly on the implementation of this legislation. Today, it is being done for the sake of a privatization scheme. There will probably be other occasions when the Official Languages Act will be diluted and weakened even further.

Therefore, we will have to be vigilant, we will have to continue to make people aware of what is happening with official languages which still carry a lot of support. Despite what some people are saying, the Official Languages Act has the support of 65 to 70 per cent of Canadians. I think it would have been better to maintain the full application of the Act in the National Capital Area, in the Montreal Metropolitan Area, in New Brunswick (the only officially bilingual province), in Ontario, and in some designated areas.

In politics you do not win all your battles! The main thing is to try your best. If there are slight improvements to this bill, fine, thank you very much.

Honourable senators, if Senator Frith's motion is rejected, I will have to abstain on the final vote.

**Hon. Eymard G. Corbin:** Honourable senators, I followed this bill since it came to the Senate. I am among those who were fairly vocal! I was accused, at times, of having a rather forceful language. I offer no apology for that, since we made a bit of progress.

I will be supporting the amendment of Senator Frith. I have known too many cases where rights, whether they were linguistic or based on ministerial promises, were not respected and still are not! Just imagine what the situation of French-speaking Manitobans would be if their rights had only been guaranteed by a ministerial letter! Would they have any rights today! I do not think so. It is legislation which protects them.

If, on the one hand, we subscribe to the general concept of official bilingualism in this country, it seems to me that a guarantee like the one offered by the minister is not acceptable. I am glad, however, he saw our point and I congratulate the Senate on drawing that to his attention, as it went unnoticed through the House of commons.

If we consider it worthwhile, I think we should take the next logical step, and build this protection into the legislation.

The Government Leader is worried about the delays in final approval if the Senate brings any amendment to this bill but I believe there is no reason for concern. If something is good per se in the Senate, if something is good for the unity of this nation, I feel that it will be well received by the members in the House of Commons.

I know it has become some kind of a game for the House to oppose any proposition made here in the Senate. On this fundamental question, I think we should set aside any partisanship. I am happy to see the minister went all the way to the content of his letter.

However, as I said, in my 23 years of political life on the Hill, I have seen too many promises made by ministers which disappeared with them when they left their department.

According to me, whatever the quality of the person making the promise, when that person is gone there is no commitment, save for the good will of his successor.

I regret to have to emphasize this, but I remember that the minister that came to defend this bill before the Senate Committee was absolutely inflexible in spite of our arguments. If tomorrow that minister was to replace the minister that makes these promises today, where would we be, where would be those guarantees? There are no guarantees, unless they are included in the bill.

For that reason, I will support the amendment of Senator Frith.

**Hon. L. Norbert Thériault:** Honourable senators, I will not repeat the arguments that were made here and elsewhere in Committee, but they tell me very clearly to support the motion of Senator Frith, and more importantly to oppose the legislation in its present form.

Honourable senators, those who, like me and many others here, experienced the long struggle in New Brunswick and elsewhere to have the Official Languages Act complied with know that, in this field, progress was made only through the acts that were passed either by the provincial legislatures or by Parliament.

I sincerely want to congratulate my colleague, Senator Simard, for his stand, because like him I know that it is not always possible to take a stand that goes against a policy or a piece of legislation supported by one's party or government. Senator Simard has done that today, and he has often done it in the past as well, because what is involved here is the protection of the official languages.

Even if I am told that this bill is legally acceptable, I cannot help but think that many other bills and acts more often reflect a perception than what is actually written.

With this bill, I believe that the present government signals that it is ready to put aside the requirements of the Official Languages Act in Canada.

In New Brunswick where we Francophones account for roughly one-third of the population, we just had a provincial election last fall where people opposed to the principle of official languages had the chance to support a political party that formally opposes official languages.

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The net result is that 80 percent of the population of New Brunswick voted against that party and in favour of the other three who supported the Official Languages Act. So I believe that reflects somewhat what New Brunswick has always thought of the Canadian policy on official languages.

Without saying once more what my colleagues Simard and Corbin have so well put, I wish to urge all senators, those of New Brunswick in particular who are mostly on the other side of the House, to do like senator Simard, and also to ask at least a few English-speaking senators who are on the Government side, to demonstrate once and for all that they also support the Official Languages Act.