

Supply

● (1730)

[Translation]

Mr. John Parry (Kenora—Rainy River): Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity today, as New Democratic Party spokesman on the Official Languages Committee, to rise in the House and offer my comments on the motion of the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier). As the Minister of State indicated earlier, I am sure that one of the Hon. Member's motives in moving this motion was his frustration at not, at least not yet being able to determine the Government's legislative agenda. Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, it is a sign of the Hon. Member's continuing dedication to the issue of official languages that he felt he had to present the motion before the House today.

Madam Speaker, I see the former Joint Chairman of the Official Languages Committee is waiting his turn, and I don't deprive him of this opportunity to comment on the motion. The fact that this motion is before us today may also be partly due to an article that appeared in *Le Devoir* on Saturday which stated that the Prime Minister had decided to move quickly on the issue of official languages. According to reporter Michel Vastel, the Prime Minister's principal collaborator had indicated the Bill would be passed in a matter of weeks. I was surprised that Mr. Vastel reported this phrase Government spokesmen are very fond of using in referring to the Government's legislative agenda, especially since he went on to say that Francophone associations outside Quebec and the Commissioner of Official Languages were afraid the Official Languages Bill would die with the Government.

Madam Speaker, I have no reason to doubt the Minister of State's assurances that the Bill will be tabled in the House for second reading in a matter of weeks. However, ever since I became a Member of this House, I have seen weeks turn into months and months into years. I would rest a lot easier if the Government were to set a deadline for tabling this Bill.

Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier, as a Member of his Government's caucus and in the present caucus of the Official Opposition in recent years, has worked to promote the cause of bilingualism in Canada. The preamble to the present Bill also contains many proposals that we in the New Democratic Party would have no trouble supporting. For instance, the federal Government undertook to achieve, with due regard to the principle of selection of personnel according to merit, full participation of English-speaking Canadians and French-speaking Canadians in its institutions. Also in the preamble, the government recognizes the importance of preserving and enhancing the use of languages other than English and French while strengthening the status and use of the official languages. I will return to this point later.

The Government is also committed to cooperating with provincial governments and their institutions to support the development of English and French linguistic minority communities, to provide services in both English and French, to respect the constitutional guarantees of minority language

educational rights and to enhance opportunities for all to learn both English and French.

Madam Speaker, these are objectives which are no different from those of the NDP and the Government, and I am sure the Official Opposition agrees to them. The problem of, course, is to start from these principles to come up in concrete terms to a bill that will be acceptable to this Chamber. I will not add my own suspicions, but the reporter that I quoted earlier says that a fraction of the Conservative caucus does not want the government to proceed with this Bill.

Madam Speaker, the specific question of course is: When will this Bill be studied at second reading and sent to committee? I and my Party cannot agree to a short Friday afternoon debate. The matter is important enough to justify a serious examination both in the House and in committee.

Madam Speaker, I wish at this point to briefly examine the history of official bilingualism in Canada. Everyone knows, everyone remembers, those who lived in Canada at the time, that there was some degree of political unrest, let us say, in our country and specially in the province of Quebec, with regard to society, culture and language and that all conclusions are not to be dismissed and that the issues raised are not all resolved yet.

We have had difficulty in the past to recognize what is now described as the French fact in Canada. Looking back on the work done some 30 years ago by the Tremblay commission in Quebec, we can recall that what was put to the test at the time was the province of Quebec's primary responsibility with regard to cultural and social policy and the survival of the francophone community in Quebec.

I will recall, if I may, a few experiences which occurred to me when I came to Canada almost 18 years ago. I came to Canada with the idea, the impression that I was coming to a bilingual country where I would discover that most people—most Canadians were bilingual. Obviously, I was therefore slightly disappointed and quickly lost any illusions I had in that regard. Once in Montreal, at Dorval airport as a new immigrant, I attempted to answer the immigration officer in French. After a brief exchange, he asked for my passport and as I handed it to him, he flattered me to some degree perhaps, madam Speaker, by commenting that he had thought I was a Belgian, whereas I was merely an English immigrant doing his very best to answer in French when questions were asked in French.

Having spent two years in Montreal, I have had the opportunity of course to develop an awareness of the true nature of things and I remain, to this day, somewhat astounded by the degree of solitude, as it is described, which I have encountered in that great city where I received such a warm welcome to Canada. Indeed, in the two years I spent in Montreal I did not meet more than a few Anglophones who, in my opinion, spoke French better than I. I was then struck by the fact that in that not exactly bilingual society, in that community where the two languages co-exist, Francophones