

Official Languages Act

September 1984 we have made great strides as a Government and a country. We have the Meech Lake Accord and we have federal-provincial relations on a level which has not been seen in the last 18 to 20 years. Even when provinces and the federal Government disagree they do so on a level and plane which Canadians understand. It is not down on the low road. We have a working agreement. The child care effort, the tax reform effort, and all the improvements which have been made through the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) demonstrate the ability of the Government to bring the provinces and the federal Government to work together on a regional basis.

This Bill demonstrates the Government's willingness to work together with the founding peoples of this country. I ask that the House and all Members join in the debate, in second reading passage, in committee work, in report stage, and in third reading so that we can send this Act on to the other place as soon as possible.

Mr. Caccia: Madam Speaker, I listened attentively to the speech of the Hon. Member. It was very well reasoned, very thoughtful and, by all normal standards, very convincing. Yet I know that the Hon. Minister has difficulties convincing some of his own back-benchers of the merits of this Bill. I fail to understand why he is not capable of convincing a number of them who are present in this Chamber to abandon the backward, ill-informed, and unrealistic position they have on this very important Bill.

This Bill puts forward a basic concept which has not only been accepted but supported in recent decades by Canadians all across the country. This Bill recognizes a cultural and linguistic reality. The Minister has made some very good points in advancing the merits of this Bill which deserve the support of his own back-benchers.

Therefore, I hope that his back-benchers listened carefully and will not come forward with notions of cost as the Hon. Member for Winnipeg did, as though to him dollars are more important than the national fiber and the cultural and linguistic values of the country. That is unacceptable. If Hon. Members prefer to put dollars before Canadian unity, that is their political responsibility, but we on this side of the House will not stand for that nonsense—we will not. That is a backward, asinine concept.

Therefore, why is the Minister not capable, with the well-reasoned position he took a few minutes ago, of convincing some of the backward back-benchers who are sitting behind him today?

Mr. Lewis: Madam Speaker, I tried to suggest in my remarks that this subject was worthy of a long, hard, and reasoned debate and that we should try to deal with it on the high road. I am not at all surprised that my hon. colleague deals with it on the low road. It comes as no surprise to my colleagues in my Party that the Member would try to divide my Party as his Party has tried to do in the past.

Mr. Caccia: No, no.

Mr. Lewis: The Member shakes his head. We were in the House when the legislation on the rights of Francophones in Manitoba was brought forward with one intent in mind, that being to divide our Party. Quite frankly, the gambit failed miserably. We have had a bellyful of being divided by the Liberal Party on this and similar issues. We have had it.

This Hon. Member makes this comment after the Liberals demonstrated four different positions on international trade in Vancouver. Where does the Hon. Member stand on that issue?

Mr. Caccia: What about linguistic rights?

Mr. Lewis: On this issue there is no need to worry about our caucus and our back-benchers. That Member is a dissident who used to sit rather close to the Leader of his Party but is now out on the edge and clinging by his fingernails. He has to have his nomination early because he is afraid of it. The earliest nomination in the Liberal Party is sitting right there because he is afraid he is going to lose it. Do not try to divide our Party with a simple tactic like that.

Mr. Domm: Madam Speaker, I wonder whether it is fair of the Member in the Official Opposition to bring forward this thought without considering whether he would endorse a resolution to the Quebec Government similar to the resolution which his Party put forward to the Manitoba Government. I want him to think about that.

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I have a number of concerns dealing with the regulations that will be put in place by orders in council which will permit the Cabinet or Government to implement language in the work place. One of the principal reasons I object to the Bill, and this is a major dilemma, is that we do not know what will be the basis for these orders in council, we do not know the regulations.

The Minister referred to Clause 2(a) and Clause 31 dealing with regulations which refer to such things as population of an area in order to determine where there is significant demand. The Minister referred to what percentage of the total area would cause these regulations to be implemented. In order for me to support this Bill and represent my constituents, I want to know what that population of an area should be, and what the percentage of the total area should be. I could probably consider whether to support Bill C-72 based on that information which the Minister has referred to as important. If that information is important to the Minister in implementing this, it is important to Members of Parliament in knowing what they are approving in principle.

A similar case, which everyone would understand, existed with a former Bill passed in this Parliament under the former Government. It indicated that orders in council could be passed on the recommendations of a metric commissioner to the Cabinet, implementing mandatory metric in various industries. That did not work. Parliament had no input.