

*Official Languages*

history, as it indeed it still does. I think in the main the explanation is sound, cogent and acceptable to anyone with an impartial mind.

The second point of agreement is the reiteration of the importance of protecting minority language rights both in English Canada and in French Canada and the explanation of how the federal government's policy of bilingualism, in principle at least, is intended to protect those rights. We agree in principle. As has been made clear on this side of the House very often, we criticize the application of the principle, but it has been a matter of detail and not one of intent.

The third point I want to make is that we appreciate what I see as the new stress on the need for action in areas outside federal jurisdiction and within the purview of the provinces, such as the language used in our courts and in the legislatures where it is important to extend recognition and protection to minority rights. I think that is a new emphasis and one which is indeed very important to the country.

[Translation]

Our main criticism against this paper is that the government should have moved in that direction ten years ago. They have done very little to explain the importance of bilingualism to the Canadian people since the Official Languages Act was implemented. After the failure of the Victoria conference, the federal government no longer took an interest in the rights of minorities outside federal institutions.

[English]

What concerns me very much about the minister's statement today and the document itself is the "wait and see" attitude which runs through them. I repeat that this is a serious concern. The government, it is indicated, is willing to do this or willing to consider that, but the document, unless I missed something on first reading it, is completely lacking in a firm commitment to do anything. Apart from some overdue house-cleaning measures related to the federal bilingualism program, we have very little indication—in fact, virtually none at all—of a firm course of action in the future. The government is willing to support, for example, funding for education of minority language groups where the numbers might otherwise not justify such facilities in the provinces. The government is willing to support language training costs for provincial civil servants. But where is there an indication that the government is committed—not simply willing to consider something, or willing to co-operate—to going out to the provinces and saying that it has "X" number of dollars for a certain purpose which ought to be spent in "Y" area?

The federal government should be asking the provinces what they think. We would welcome that initiative. We say that in terms of the old motion of co-operative federalism, the federal government should not be hesitating to go to the provinces of Canada, regardless of their governments—and there have been New Democratic governments as well as Liberal and Conservative governments—and telling them that up to the present time they have not done everything they should have been doing within their jurisdiction in dealing with majority and

[Mr. Broadbent.]

minority language rights. I think it is time we got explicit about it. It is time for the federal government, particularly, to get explicit about it. It is time it went to the provinces suggesting courses of action. It is time the federal government was willing to provide financial assistance, and not simply in principle. It is time the federal government set aside money to be spent in particular provinces if they co-operate in this area. That is my most serious concern about what the minister said today.

We have an indication of some good intentions. There is an indication of recognition of a failure to protect linguistic rights, particularly for minorities, depending on which province we are talking about. However, we did not get what I was hoping we would, and that is a very explicit commitment to act and a very explicit recognition that in a federal state like Canada, with many cultures but two principal official languages, what is required is national leadership. National leadership does not mean simple imposition of detailed programs worked out here in Ottawa. It does require that the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State go to the provinces on issues of national concern suggesting that action should be taken not only at the federal level but also at the provincial level. The Prime Minister and the minister should welcome provincial co-operation in spending in this area, and the federal government should be making specific dollar allocations. I am disappointed that we do not have an indication of greater initiative coming directly from the federal government in this respect.

As important as this issue is, I do not believe that majority and minority language rights are central to the issue of national unity at this time. I think we are kidding ourselves if that is still a central belief, and I say with serious concern to the government of the day and indirectly—because he is not here, for very good reasons, I am sure—to the Prime Minister that if they believed that in 1968, in 1972 and in 1974, I hope they have got over the illusion. The language rights issue is important for its own sake, and all of us who want to show political leadership, and all of our political parties—and I use "leadership" in the broadest sense, meaning every member of parliament showing leadership in his community—must stand 100 per cent behind the principles of the Official Languages Act and behind the thrust of this document.

I believe in the document that much, but I want to stress that if it is seen as a cure for the separatist forces in Quebec, as I read the studies which have been done—and I do not want to appear arrogant and all-knowledgeable as an outsider—and as I speak to my friends and my political opponents in the province of Quebec, the language issue, as a concern now for Quebecers in dealing with the independence movement, is not an issue. It is important for Francophone Canadians outside Quebec that we do everything we can on that issue. But, Mr. Speaker, we delude ourselves seriously if we think that the thrust indicated in this paper, as desirable and important as it is, will be significant in the national unity debate that has to be fought and won in the province of Quebec.