

Privilege—Mr. Hamelin

[Translation]

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask you to give serious consideration to the request of the Hon. Member for Charlevoix (Mr. Hamelin). As assistant critic in the field of the official languages I know that the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), who is responsible for this question, would want to express strong support for the request made by the Hon. Member for Charlevoix. I think it is very important to give careful consideration to this request.

I also have another favour to ask you. When you study the request concerning the official languages, I would like you to consider the feminization of words, for every time we ask that a report be written in French we are invariably told that there can be no question of feminizing words because this is not covered by the Standing Orders of the House and, as it happens, it is up to the Committee on Official Languages to enforce it. Since we now seem to be experiencing some difficulty with respect to the official languages in the House, the time might be appropriate to consider this other issue as well. I should think that it has now become common to use feminine words when referring to Canadian women and, in my opinion, the House of Commons should be up to date in the presentation of its reports and documents.

So I would urge you to give serious consideration to the request of the Hon. Member for Charlevoix with respect to the official languages, but to consider as well the feminization of words in all House of Commons reports.

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, I would like also to make a few submissions in order to assist you in dealing with the matter at hand, the question of privilege, since you will have to determine later on whether the privileges of the Hon. Member for Charlevoix have been breached, as he has submitted.

The matter he is raising, that the Official Languages Act may not apply to Parliament, is not new. It has been raised on a number of occasions in this House, for instance by the Hon. Member who usually sits next to me, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier.

I also had an opportunity to read legal opinions submitted by Mr. Maingot, Mr. Pelletier and others.

However, I would remind Your Honour that they are just that, legal opinions, and indeed only the courts could rule whether the Official Languages Act applies to Parliament, the House of Commons and the Senate. It is ironic that the application of the Official Languages Act to the House of Commons is being debated, because certainly this is the most bilingual of all federal institutions. All documents here are published in both languages. All debates here can be held in both languages. We have here simultaneous translation, both in the House, in Committee of the Whole and in our standing committees. However, this is the point the Hon. Member for Charlevoix (Mr. Hamelin) chose to rise just the same.

I respectfully submit, Mr. Speaker, with the purpose of assisting you in reaching a decision, that the Hon. Member's privileges have not been breached, because this would have required something to have happened here in this House, within this Chamber, or in one of our committees or in one of our offices, through which the Hon. Member would not have been served in his own language, or would have been deprived of the right to use the language of his choice—something like the absence of simultaneous translation that would have prevented the Hon. Member or some of us from understanding in their own language. But this has not happened to my knowledge.

I think what the Hon. Member is attempting to do is indicate he is not satisfied with the fact that in his view the Official Languages Act does not apply to Parliament. Therefore, this is rather a point of debate as to the interpretation of the Act that he is rising, and in my view he cannot content, as far as the Standing Orders are concerned, Mr. Speaker, that the privileges of a Member have been breached, since Members can speak in the language of their choice, and receive all the documents in both official languages.

In order to pursue his worthwhile goals, and I commend him for that, the goal is to ensure, and I also agree with that, that the Official Languages Act apply to Parliament, the House of Commons and the Senate. At that point, what should be done is this—an amendment should be introduced here, to clarify whether the Act applies to Parliament. The Hon. Member did not do that. Rather, he chose to raise a question of privilege, and I submit that in so doing he erred.

I feel that the Official Languages Act should be amended. I would invite the Hon. Member to do so. If he does not intend to do it, I myself will introduce an amendment in this House, because it should be clear that Parliament must be subject to bilingualism. Even if in effect Parliament has always respected both official languages, it is clear to me that the Official Languages Act should apply here beyond a reasonable doubt. But as far as privilege is concerned, it is my view that Your Honour should not rule there is a *prima facie* case, because there is none.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Charlevoix (Mr. Hamelin) on the same issue.

Mr. Hamelin: Mr. Speaker, I have listened carefully to the argument of my hon. colleagues. However, I wish to explain that for me, it is not a matter of customs, or a matter of services which are effectively . . . Just now, in the House of Commons, we are quite properly provided with services in both official languages. I feel it is a matter of right. I am not asking for a handout as a parliamentarian; it is a matter of right which is not based on customs. Does this Parliament, the Senate and its components recognize bilingualism as a right the Canadian reality of this linguistic duality which is essential to this country? I feel as a parliamentarian that my right has been denied.