



Bulletin

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THE LANGUAGES OF CANADIAN DIPLOMACY

The following is part of a statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Mitchell Sharp, to a seminar for officers of the Department of External Affairs on August 26:

...You will no doubt be familiar with the statement made by Mr. Pearson in the House of Commons in April 1966 on "Bilingualism in the Public Service of Canada". Let me say at the outset that the guidelines set forth in that statement remain an important part of the Government's policy on bilingualism in Canada and that I, for my part, will do my best to see that they are implemented in our Department.

I do not intend to review Mr. Pearson's statement in detail today...Nevertheless, some of the main points are worthy of special attention because of their implications for all members of the Department, and particularly for officers starting out on a career in the Government service. In describing the Government's goals in this field, Mr. Pearson noted that within a reasonable period of time it was the Government's objective to realize four basic and very significant steps in the public service:

(1) That, as a matter of practice, all internal communications whether oral or written should take place in either English or French, depending on the language of the person concerned;

(2) That all communications with the public should normally be in either language as appropriate;

(3) That, in matters of recruitment and training, the values of both linguistic communities be given full weight; and finally,

(4) That it should be a general objective to create a climate in which civil servants of both linguistic groups can work together towards common goals, using their own language, and on the basis of

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their own cultural values, while at the same time appreciating those of the other linguistic community.

I will return in a few moments to the implications of these objectives for the foreign service. I should underline here, however, that they are not merely, or even primarily, a matter of achieving impressive statistics with respect to the percentage of fluent English-speakers or French-speakers. They relate rather to the fundamental human concern of ensuring that every Canadian, and particularly those in the employ of the Federal Government, can feel fully at home working in his own language.

I said...when I was Minister of Finance that "the aim of the present Government is to give every Canadian the right to express himself in either French or English and be understood when he deals with his Federal Government, at least in the capital of the country". I also went further stating that "for the first time Canadians whose mother tongue is French will be able to compete on an equal footing with English-speaking Canadians". It is clear that these goals are of fundamental importance within the Government service itself.