

any further because it cannot be debated without unanimous consent.

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● (1440)

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

MR. TRUDEL—FAILURE OF EMPLOYEES IN MONTREAL UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE OFFICES TO COMMUNICATE IN BOTH OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Jacques-L. Trudel (Montreal-Bourassa): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

Many federal employees are now denying some members of this House the services to which they are entitled, especially the manpower and immigration office in Montreal. Our secretaries try to obtain information for themselves or for the members, but it is denied to them when they ask in either language.

When a French-speaking individual applies to those offices and the employee is English-speaking, the information is denied to him. When English-speaking individuals make inquiries, they are turned away just as we are and just as are those who were asked to inquire.

Not only do I consider the situation is very serious, but I think we should refer the problem to the Committee on Privileges and Elections so as to settle once for all this matter which prevents people and members from obtaining services. I therefore ask you, Mr. Speaker, to defer immediately the matter to the Committee on Privileges and Elections so that we may know how to deal with it.

[English]

Mr. Rod Blaker (Lachine-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support, as strongly as I can the representations made by the hon. member for Montreal-Bourassa (Mr. Trudel). I would argue seriously and sincerely that he has a valid question of privilege. If at any time I, as a member of parliament, am denied the right to address citizens in Montreal in the language of my choice, I submit that I am handicapped in performing my functions properly and to the best of my ability.

Some hon. Members: Hear, Hear!

Mr. Blaker: The procedure currently under discussion in the House—that is the representation made by the hon. member for Montreal-Bourassa as a question of privilege—may be an awkward one to consider although I would argue it is a valid question. I think the underlying point should be made that we members of parliament from Montreal have certain responsibilities with respect to assuring our constituents, whether they be French or English, that there is an official policy on bilingualism and that the federal government stands for bilingualism.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blaker: It seems to me that, short of a motion under Standing Order 43, there is no way in which such individuals as the Acting Prime Minister, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) or the President

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of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien) may wish to assure this House that all members of parliament and indirectly through them, all members of the population, have access to the language of their choice when dealing with the federal civil service.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I fully appreciate the concern expressed by hon. members. Although this is a matter of personnel policy under the direction and mandate of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien), it happens that organizations under my direction have been involved in this situation. I want to assure the House that it is government policy and the policy of the Department of Manpower and Immigration and the Unemployment Insurance Commission to provide service to the public in both official languages and that in the offices—

Mr. Fairweather: That is the law.

Mr. Andras:—under discussion there are bilingual people designated as such whose job and responsibility is to provide service in either of the two official languages. Any failure or refusal to do so by any individual is completely unauthorized.

An hon. Member: Fire them!

Mr. Andras: Where such failure has been established we are prepared to take disciplinary action.

An hon. Member: Fire them!

Mr. Tom Cossitt (Leeds): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same question of privilege. At about a quarter to two this afternoon, my office was in communication with the Unemployment Insurance Commission office located at 7510 Viau Street, Montreal and was advised by the person who answered the telephone that the entire staff was refusing to speak the English language until they were paid additional money by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien). I think, Mr. Speaker, as hon. members opposite have said, that this is an infringement on the rights of members of parliament who attempt to get information from the UIC. It is also an affront to the Canadian public who, by virtue of the Official Languages Act, have a right to expect to be addressed in both languages when calling offices in areas designated as bilingual.

In bringing bilingualism to this country, the government has made much of the fact that they were in favour of bilingualism, so I am sure they will agree that this matter should be dealt with speedily by this House in order that those offices not rendering proper service in both languages in designated bilingual districts can be immediately dealt with. If employees refuse to offer those services to the Canadian public, they should be disciplined immediately by the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras).

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I have instructed the officials in my department to inquire into that subject. If officials work-