

Oral Questions

Considering these harsh criticisms, could the Minister explain why his Department has failed to implement the Official Languages Act firmly and fairly and how he intends to ensure equality between Francophones and Anglophones in the armed forces?

[English]

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I believe the Hon. Member misinterpreted what the Commissioner of Official Languages said. This is a very serious matter and it has been taken very seriously by myself and the Government.

The Commissioner of Official Languages recognized that there had been positive steps made by the Department of National Defence. Bilingual manning was increased in real terms, active offer of service at NDHQ was improved dramatically. The official languages co-ordinator network has been improved and we were subject in the Department, Mr. Speaker, to fewer complaints over the last two years than we had been in the past.

It is important to recognize that the opportunities that we provide in second language training, both English and French, the opportunities to work in one's language, and the location of the different units throughout Canada make it difficult to maintain that second language training which we initiate when people are inducted into Canada's armed forces.

POSITION OF MINISTER

Hon. William Rompkey (Labrador): Mr. Speaker, this particular criticism of the Commissioner is a very clear interpretation. He says that on the most senior management bodies, the Defence Council and the Defence Management Committee, there are 11 Anglophones and no Francophones. That is very clear. Is this not unfair in view of the linguistic make-up of this country? What does he intend to do about it?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, no one would suggest, and I know the Hon. Member is not suggesting, that promotion in Canada's military comes about from the ability to speak one or other of Canada's official languages. Promotion comes about in Canada's military for service and capability and the ability to speak both of Canada's official languages.

I can inform the Hon. Member that in 1983, in the general officers ranks in Canada's military 14.3 per cent were Francophone. Today, 1989, 23.2 per cent are Francophone.

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[Translation]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

THE MEMBER FOR LÉVIS—RESIGNATION FROM
COMMITTEE VICE-CHAIRMANSHIP—PRIME MINISTER'S
POSITION

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. It is reported that the Member for Lévis is now being investigated by the RCMP. Now this Member, Gabriel Fontaine, is vice-chairman of the Committee on Privileges and Elections. Will the Prime Minister ask the Member for Lévis to resign his position until the RCMP completes its investigation?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member raises a question which I suppose affects the operation of the House. The Member in question has already indicated that since he is being investigated, he would withdraw from the Progressive Conservative caucus and I presume that he will also withdraw from other official functions related to the application of the Standing Orders of the House.

[English]

SUGGESTED RESIGNATION FROM TORY CAUCUS

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Prime Minister. I think the Prime Minister was anticipating my next question. The first question I asked was, in light of the fact that the Member for Lévis is the Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Privileges and Elections will the Prime Minister ask him to remove himself from that committee?

Second, will he follow the example set by Mr. Grisé and remove himself from the Tory caucus? Will he and any other Member who is being investigated remove themselves from the Tory caucus until such investigation is made public? That is the question I am asking.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend says, and I am quoting him, that