

Adjournment Debate

amount of the dollar depreciation. While all imports are subject to this effect to one degree or another, it is particularly evident with respect to food prices. There are two reasons for this. First, many food products are simply not produced in Canada due to climatic conditions and they have to be imported. Second, due to the perishable nature of foodstuffs, the impact of the lower dollar shows up right away; there are no appreciable inventories to stretch out and soften the impact.

While these price impacts are regrettable, they are unavoidable in an economy as open as Canada's. For example, the recent downward movement in the U.S. currency is not nearly so onerous in its price implications for the U.S. economy simply because imports form, relative to Canada, almost an insignificant portion of U.S. final demand and intermediate products.

As I have already mentioned, the non-food component of the Canadian CPI, while rising somewhat faster than the comparable U.S. series, has not been too far out of line. Part of the divergence that does exist in these non-food prices can also be traced to the lower Canadian dollar. In addition to making prices of consumer goods higher, production costs, which of course eventually wind up in final prices, have also been adversely affected to some degree since imported materials prices may now be higher as a consequence of the lower dollar. It is also the case that because energy prices started out at a lower level in Canada than in the United States, the rates of increase here must now be greater as we adjust to the world level. This is reflected in the CPI where Canadian energy prices in December were up 11.4 per cent while the November figures for the U.S. show a percentage increase of 8.1 per cent.

The greater upward pressure on our prices relative to the U.S. over the recent past must also surely be a lagged consequence of our very inflationary wage rate increases over the past few years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret I have to interrupt the parliamentary secretary but his time has expired.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE—REQUEST FOR AMENDMENT TO
PERMIT USE OF FRENCH IN ONTARIO COURTS

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Mr. Speaker, on December 13 last, I asked the Minister of Justice whether he would use his good offices to encourage the province of Ontario to recognize the use of French in all provincial courts.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that the Ontario Judicature Act formally forbids the use of any language other than English in Ontario courts of justice.

The amendments to be made to the acts both federal and provincial would allow the use of French in the provincial courts.

As information is the best tool in clearing up misunderstandings, and in the hope of stirring interest in the English majority of my own province, I shall therefore use Shakespeare's language to add to what I have to say.

[Mr. Lumley.]

[English]

It is not generally known by Ontarians that their own French-speaking population has no legal right to use French in everyday dealings, such as the drafting of legal contracts, insurance policies and other important transactions, including even personal wills which must be translated into English before being officially registered. I sincerely believe that when English-speaking Canadians understand the situation which exists in some Canadian provinces where there are substantial French-speaking minorities they will wish to raise these Canadians, often their own neighbours, friends or even relatives, to the legal status of fully-fledged citizens of a state where the majority is respectful and generous in recognizing and accepting language equality whether in the legal, health, educational or social domains.

In the short time allowed me tonight I should like to call attention to a particular problem which affects French-speaking Canadians living in Ontario. Bearing in mind that French in the Ontario courts is tolerated only in a discretionary way without any legal guarantee and that section 127 of the Ontario Judicature Act formally forbids the use of any language other than English in Ontario courts, last December I asked the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford) what pressures he intended to bring to bear on his Ontario counterpart to make sure that section 127 of the act might be amended so as to allow the use of French in all Ontario courts. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that in the Speech from the Throne it was stated that after consultation with the provinces the government of Canada would amend the Criminal Code so as to guarantee the right of accused persons to be tried in the official language of their choice. This commitment follows the positive actions taken by the present Attorney General of Ontario, the Hon. Roy McMurtry, whereby ministerial direction and within his discretion he allowed French to be used in certain designated judicial districts, beginning with two experimental projects, Sudbury and Ottawa, and enlarging this privilege to include several other judicial areas in Ontario. This was an encouraging and far-reaching measure which pleased many residents of Ontario.

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For the first time Franco-Ontarians have been given the privilege of defending themselves before the courts in their mother tongue. I say it is a privilege, Mr. Speaker, because a privilege can be withdrawn. What we want is a right. That is what we need, and we want it enshrined in legislation.

To reach this goal of providing the right to Francophones to be heard in their own language in Ontario courts certain amendments are required to the Criminal Code. The Attorney General of Ontario has asked for these changes to the Criminal Code, and I understand also that the federal Minister of Justice is presently studying amendments with a view to making provision for accused persons to have the right of choosing the official language in which their case will be heard.