

Supply

We believe that the Treasury Board Secretariat has provided detailed guidance to Public Service managers on how to monitor and how to audit their official languages program.

In order to facilitate their work we have prepared and distributed a management review guide. As well, internal auditors in federal Departments are being given information sessions on official languages and the auditing of same. We have tried to develop government-wide policies on official languages and recommend them to Cabinet for implementation. The legislative framework which we propose in Bill C-72 would see the Treasury Board continuing its policy creation role as well as expanding it to include issuing regulations or recommending them to the Governor in Council in several areas.

• (1700)

I say to Hon. Members that since the tabling of Bill C-72 we have had our officials developing regulatory proposals in consultation with a wide variety of federal institutions. In this way we will be able to undertake at the appropriate time consultations with the various people involved with official languages to meet the requirements of the Bill.

Treasury Board is providing the leadership with the Public Service to allow for the discharge of responsibilities under the official languages policy and under Bill C-72. We feel that we have demonstrated our commitment, not only through our legislative program but by bringing the Bill forward and putting it on the Order Paper. One thing that is far too often forgotten is this. Legislation is a matter of a Government taking a decision to do something and formulating that policy into a law. The law is then printed on what is called first reading.

This is a large country in which it takes some time to get information out. No matter how often it is published or referred to or how many brochures are printed it takes a while to disseminate this information. As with other Bills we have to have public debate and parliamentary debate. There has to be media debate as well. I make no apologies for allowing this debate to take place, or for allowing different interested groups to think about legislation and to get back to us.

My hon. friend wants to move forward quickly. He suggests a lack of commitment. I suggest to him that there is absolutely no lack of commitment. There is a commitment on the part of the Government not only to this Bill but to listen to people. Where it is proven that it is necessary to take into account ideas for changes in legislation we will act. We have done that before, and we intend to do it again.

I urge the House to reject this motion out of hand. In view of the number of Members that are here today, I am sorry that we will not vote on this so that we could reject it very vividly for my hon. friend and put into place the actual situation.

I wish to close with this comment. The Government is committed to an official languages policy as expressed in Bill

C-72. If my friend would just be patient we will put it through with or without his co-operation.

Mr. Gauthier: Madam Speaker, I have a question to ask of the Minister which relates to his last comment. He said that his Government will ensure that this Bill will be passed. Can he tell us on what date the Bill will be put to the House for debate on second reading?

• (1710)

The Minister knows, as I know, that there are rules and regulations that have to be written to go along with the Bill. He knows that that will take time. To put those regulations in place in an appropriate amount of time the Bill must be passed soon. Is he ready to pass this Bill at second reading this week or at the beginning of next week? If he is, I will give him the assurance that the Opposition will co-operate to the best of our ability. Members of the Opposition will want to be heard. It cannot be as he suggests, one speaker from each Party. That may be sufficient for him. We do not accept that because at that time those who want to express a view on the principles of this Bill at second reading must be heard. It would not be proper for anyone to railroad this Bill through second reading with but one speaker from each Party.

Is the Minister ready to tell us when the Bill will be brought forward? Does he not appreciate that this is an urgent matter that presses upon the House so that the regulations that are required can be written into law before the next election?

Mr. Lewis: Madam Speaker, with respect to the first question, I point out to my hon. friend that we are proceeding apace with legislation and trying to fit everything in, trying to give enough advance notice so that everyone can speak on particular Bills. Sometimes things go faster than I expect, and other times things are slowed down. I expect that we will be in a position to commence second reading within the next few weeks.

As to the second part of my hon. friend's question, I do not always expect that he listens to everything I say, but I believe that in the text of my remarks I pointed out that we have been looking at the regulations which would go apace with this Bill. Obviously, one of the reasons that legislation is printed is to allow for it to be debated, as I have suggested, in the media, in Parliament and by members of the public.

There is another place that legislation is debated as well, that is to say by the people who are in charge of administering it. I can assure my hon. friend that we are taking advice from people who have an interest in the legislation internally and that that process is proceeding.

While it would be nice to have the Bill passed and then start the process, it is fair to say, as with a great many things, that one starts with a review of the regulations, something that has already started. I think my hon. friend will find that when his Party finally lets this Bill pass we will proceed quickly with the regulations.