

Official Languages

spreading rumours that they had not checked or giving examples of dissatisfaction, the causes of which they had not even taken the trouble to establish.

I remember in particular the case of a public servant who was ineligible for a promotion in the city of Montreal and who claimed that after living 10 years in Montreal, he never, and I quote:

had the chance to learn French.

When I was asked myself on a television program what I thought of this public servant's comment, I answered to the reporter who was questioning me: I am going to answer by a question. If, after living 10 years in Toronto or even in Ottawa, I was to claim that I never had the chance to learn English, who would believe me? The reporters told me: You are not supposed to ask questions, we are. One of them then said: By refusing to answer, you gave me an eloquent answer.

It is really to put an end to such practices, which are extremely detrimental to the cause of the official languages in Canada, that the government introduced the resolution now before us, so that after the principles are approved, nobody afterwards can undermine the efforts at implementation on the pretext that he was not consulted on their application or that he disagrees with the terms and that he was never given the chance to say so.

• (1600)

Thanks to this resolution, hon. members now have the opportunity—and they should take advantage of it—to say where they stand in respect to the application of what they have already accepted in principle. The resolution proposes reasonable, sound, practical and realistic measures, as the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) has shown very well during debate.

So far, what is the basis for the opposition's objections on this matter? Except for the Social Credit Party—I shall come to that later—the opposition has made known its intention—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the minister, but it being four o'clock . . . Is the hon. Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) rising on a point of order?

[*English*]

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member of the Conservative Party whose motion would ordinarily be dealt with during the next hour is, I understand, agreeable to forgoing private members' hour on the understanding that his motion retains its place. We could therefore continue with the present item of business for the next hour.

Mr. Baldwin: That is correct, Mr. Speaker; the hon. member for Peel South (Mr. Blenkarn) is willing to make that sacrifice at this time in light of the subject which is being discussed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): We agree, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. Pelletier (Hochelaga).]

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matte: Mr. Speaker, we agree.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Then, since there is unanimity to forego the private members' hour, the hon. Minister of Communications has the floor again.

Mr. Pelletier (Hochelaga): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the House and more particularly the hon. member for Peel South (Mr. Blenkarn).

So, I was going to say that, except for the Social Credit Party of Canada, to which I shall return in a moment, the opposition has stated its intent to support the resolution, for which I commend it and I rejoice like, doubtless, the overwhelming majority of members.

However, I would like to note as briefly as possible some points of disagreement which have been expressed by the Leader of the Official Opposition, last night, by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) and finally by the spokesman for the Social Credit Party of Canada (Mr. Matte).

First, I would like to comment the amendment introduced by the official opposition and say that it is rather amusing for anyone who in 1969 took part in the debate previous to the passing of the Official Languages Act. In the course of that debate, and I was re-reading it this morning in *Hansard*, the position of the opposition was to the effect that it was useless—that was the word—to pass a bill concerning the official languages. That position was to the effect that the government had but to issue directives, take decisions at the executive level, and not to go through all the ceremonial of the passing of an act. That was a viewpoint, and I would not like by recalling it to take any credit from the opposition for having finally supported the Official Languages Act.

We were told that after all, as far as principles were concerned, we did not need a law. I cannot but be surprised to hear today that we have to legislate at the implementation level.

The reason why the government decided not to legislate in this case, was best explained by the Leader of the Opposition himself last night when he said, and I quote:

. . . that these guidelines have to be, and should be flexible, and that they have to be subject to change . . .

Obviously. But he asked afterwards:

. . . why are we being asked to endorse them in this House?

I believe I have just said why we are asking this House to approve them.

Why not enshrine them in a piece of legislation? Precisely because they have to be, to use the very words of the Leader of the Opposition: "flexible and subject to change".

Now, we all know from experience, Mr. Speaker—and I am sure the Leader of the Opposition will admit it—that even to bring a very light change in the way of applying principles on which we have agreed, it is extremely costly to go through the legislative process which is quite painstaking, as everybody knows.

However, having established the precedent of submitting to the House for its approval the guiding principles of its endeavour as to a better balance concerning official