

*Official Languages Act*

For many years, I have been asking for amendments to the Human Rights Act that would insert the word "languages". Then, when any Anglophone is denied employment or promotion, he will have grounds to file a complaint with the Human Rights Commission and will have a proper and thorough examination of why he is being denied employment or promotion. This was recommended by the former language commissioner, Maxwell Yalden. He did not believe in the firing and dead-ending of fully qualified English-speaking Canadians.

I have been working on a case on the Hill here for two years. A uniformed Staff Sergeant here was sent away for language training. He was an Anglophone and was having difficulty learning the French language. The teacher suggested he have a hearing test so he had a hearing test and his doctor told him that he had a problem with one ear and would have great difficulty learning the French language. There was really no point in carrying on. He was sent back to the Hill and was demoted from Staff Sergeant to Sergeant, with a loss of pay.

I do not support discriminatory action like that. French-Canadians are in a different category. There are hiring teams out looking for French-Canadians for jobs in the Government. As well, French-Canadians have special promotional privileges. No other nationality has these privileges and I consider that discriminatory.

This Bill imposes bilingualism on the private sector. I would like to know where, in Penticton, British Columbia, a firm doing business with the federal Government will find fully qualified bilingual persons to handle any customers who want service in French. If the French-Canadian customer does not like the quality of the French that is being spoken by an Anglophone, or if the Anglophone is not writing proper French, the customer can file a complaint with the language czar. I suppose the language czar will warn the firm to start with, but if it cannot correct the situation, the language czar can haul it into Federal Court and prosecute the firm.

I do not support the language czar having dictatorial power and being immune from prosecution. This has not been explained properly to the Canadian people. The press has done a terrible job of explaining the contents of this Bill.

Another thing that deeply disturbs me, and I am sure Canadian taxpayers, is that there has been no figure put on what all this will cost. Will it be \$100 million, \$1 billion—who knows? That is a legitimate question. We do not have any cost figures.

For years, we condemned Liberal Governments for running blank-cheque Governments. They just shoved through legislation and we did not know what it would cost. I do not support that.

The NDP and the Liberal Party have not explained any of these things to the Canadian people. They are not serving their constituents if they are not pointing out these problem areas. The problems are genuine and we are entitled to answers.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne):** The time allowed for questions and comments has actually expired, but I will allow the Hon. Member a minute to conclude.

**Mr. Keeper:** Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to respond, because clearly statements like that should not go without response.

I note that in his closing remarks the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Assiniboine said that the NDP and the Liberals have not explained. He failed to mention his own Party. He is playing partisan politics with the very sensitive issue of national unity.

The Hon. Member did say that people will not get jobs with the federal Government if they cannot speak French. That is a complete and utter distortion of the legislation before the House. Obviously there is an advantage to being able to speak both languages, but the legislation protects the right of the individual to work in his or her own language. That means, in plain English, that the right of an English-speaking person to work in English is protected.

The Hon. Member raised the case of an individual who, in his opinion, had been discriminated against. That is a legitimate role for a Member of Parliament to play. Members of Parliament should take up individual cases, be ombudsmen and see that justice is done. Members of Parliament should continue in that tradition. However, to distort the legislation poisons the debate. This is the kind of debate in which we need more facts and less distortion.

**Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of State and Minister of State (Treasury Board)):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to participate in the debate on the new Official Languages Act, Bill C-72. I think it is important to look at what the Government has tried to do with this Bill. First, we have tried to reflect the principle of equality of status of English and French as embodied in the Constitution Act of 1982. Second, we have endeavoured to improve upon the original Official Languages Act wherever possible. I think it is important that the House understand that both objectives have to be accomplished with the principle of fairness and equity first and foremost in our minds.

No Bill is perfect. We may not have fully achieved our goals. Some of our efforts may have fallen short of the mark. In other cases, we may not have used the most precise language possible in either the French or the English version of the Bill. Nevertheless, the effort has been made. I do not sense that our efforts are being rejected out of hand.

I noticed in debate yesterday that our political opponents, the Liberals and the New Democrats, have been complimentary and supportive of our efforts. I also noticed that members of all Parties have raised questions of interpretation and intent at the same time as they have addressed the principle of the Bill. I submit that that is the purpose of second reading stage.