

try and redress past wrongs in a way that exacerbates another problem somewhere else.

Our motion is to try and get at the nub of the issue which is where numbers warrant and where there is significant need for the French language outside of Quebec then those services should be provided; likewise in Quebec where there is significant demand for the English language.

I will use my own province as an example. French barely makes the top ten languages in British Columbia. Chinese is by far the second most frequently used language. In my own riding people who are either unilingually German or use German as their mother tongue outnumber French-speaking people perhaps 200 to 1.

• (1755)

Where there are numbers and where we can justify it and where we can financially afford it, for that reason, because we want to provide it, I say let us provide it. We cannot have a Canada wide policy to try to redress some wrongs from the early part of this century. It is not practical. I do not think we can afford it. I do not think it redresses those wrongs and makes people feel better. If it did we would have unanimity. As it is we have people who are actually driven apart by the act.

The Deputy Speaker: The time has expired for questions and comments. The member was dividing his time with the hon. member for Calgary North.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have discussed at some length the problems we have had in Canada with the policy of official bilingualism and I would now like to take a look at how the policy has worked in the public service.

The recent annual report by the Commissioner of Official Languages echoed Lester Pearson, as annual reports have done practically since the inception of official bilingualism, with the following words: "The Official Languages Act requires federal institutions to ensure that English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians have equal opportunities for employment and advancement within their ranks".

This is a high minded and noble goal, one that all of us in this House can agree with. It is hard, however, to reconcile this ideal with a statement made by the hon. minister of defence, for example, on February 25: "We are putting on notice anglophones who want to be generals or chiefs of staff that they have to be totally and absolutely bilingual". This is in *Hansard* at page 1855.

He later commented: "Anglophones have more to be worried about than francophones because of the tougher bilingual requirements for senior officers".

Supply

It seems pretty clear and obvious from these completely opposed statements that the ideal and the reality of official bilingualism are two different things.

I do not believe for one moment that the hon. minister of defence favours French-speaking Canadians over English-speaking Canadians, but I think the minister is faced with the problem of having to defend an inherently flawed system.

There is good reason for the fact that of the 3,000 communications received by the ombudsman under the Official Languages Act over half were complaints of one sort or another.

To put it very simply, the current implementation of official bilingualism does not work. It does not work for anglophones and it does not work for francophones.

The term bilingual describes a person who is equally proficient in both official languages. By this definition there are very few Canadians who can claim to be fluently bilingual and yet we persist, after 27 years of failure, to believe that this policy will somehow be made to work if only we wish harder and spend more money.

By way of example let me draw your attention to many of the members on both sides of this House, myself included, who would not be eligible for employment in virtually all the senior positions in the public sector today because our command of the other official language is less than functional.

It is ironic that although many of us in this House are not bilingual we expect anyone who wants to advance in the public sector to be fluent in both languages.

The reality is that the great majority of Canadians are not bilingual and those who claim to be often are not.

The second problem is that the designation of bilingual postings is increasing, often doing so when there is no real need for bilingual services, as my hon. colleague has just indicated.

One example of the unnecessary designation of public service posts as bilingual was uncovered by the *Ottawa Citizen* in 1991. In that case there were eight positions designated as bilingual. It turns out that the eight employees were asked to use their bilingual capabilities just once in the past two years and that was when an English-speaking caller had a wrong number and the employees were able to direct him to the right one.

• (1800)

The example I have just given is one of scores which show that many public service positions are unnecessarily designated as bilingual.

There is an alternative to the present implementation of official bilingualism which will not only allow public servants to speak in the language of their choice, but will also eliminate language based discrimination.