

*Speech from the Throne*

with a heavy commitment to future good relations in our country. The program was supported by the leaders of all parties, and indeed by all parties and all sections of public opinion. What we sought to attain was a degree of bilingualism under which it should be possible for citizens, whether English or French in origin, to approach the federal government in their own language. I think that no one then or now would detract from the propriety of that objective or from its importance in terms of the survival of this nation and its equal importance in terms of the achievement of fairness in the lives of members of both linguistic groups living in this country.

I have to report that the attaining of the objective is now threatened because of the means adopted in going about it. As a member representing a public service constituency, and one close at hand, I see much evidence of growing discontent with the policy. For example, a year ago I circulated a large questionnaire in my constituency, large in the sense that over 25 per cent of all households responded. One of the questions I asked was "Are government policies regarding bilingualism generally satisfactory?" Only 1,827 people responded yes, and more than double that amount, 4,022, responded no, while 1,833 were undecided. The questionnaire was returned with many comments written by constituents. It was then made obvious to me, even more forcefully than before, that the bilingual policy of the government was not only misunderstood but was regarded as being wrong in many aspects of its application.

In my own area I have sought to be as good a representative as possible in terms of meeting the people. Since I am close at hand, I have been able to conduct a large number of public forums to keep in rather close and constant touch with my constituents. I have found, particularly in the last year and a half, that the first and indeed sometimes the only subject which is raised in my frequent contacts with my constituents is bilingualism. I am always in the position of explaining, defending, commenting, criticizing, informing and reporting on this subject. I have tried to walk what I think is a proper line and not fall into the trap of condemning every new movement out of hand nor, on the other hand, of lavishly over-praising things which this government has done. I find that the people I represent have this same concept of a sense of justice and fairness in the application of this policy. The reason it is being increasingly subjected to criticism is that in the opinion of many people it has ceased to be just and has ceased to be fair in some of the aspects of its application.

It is not an easy subject to discuss. Simultaneously I have been accused of almost being a bigot as a result of a public pronouncement and, on the other hand, I was accused the other day by the hon. member for Frontenac-Lennox-Addington (Mr. Alkenbrack) of bowing before some sinister force. But I have tried, and I say this even though the hon. member is not here, to maintain a consistent line in what I have said. My speeches and pronouncements are on record and they have been made over a period of two years. I have sought, and will continue to seek, ways and means of making this policy more sensible, fair and proper in its application.

Mr. Speaker, I have found that this is not a subject which commends itself to discussion in this House of

[Mr. Blair.]

Commons or in its committees. I say that with some regret because I think if we cannot discuss it properly here we are in difficult times. More than a year ago there was considerable uproar in this House about certain aspects of this policy. The question of bilingualism and of the policy was referred to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates along with the estimates of the Public Service Commission and other allied organisms of the government. We heard a great deal of evidence in that committee about the application of the policy, and it was highly enlightening and very important. At the end of the committee's hearing of the evidence I made a motion, recorded in proceedings of the committee No. 28 on May 18, at page 22:33 and 28:34. The proposal I made in my motion was that the government be urged to review the policy and to consider seriously making certain changes which I shall refer to a little later. To my great surprise, that motion was declared to be out of order. One could almost hear the collective sigh of relief of the representatives of all parties on that committee, because this meant that the committee was relieved of the responsibility of discussing the matter.

• (1640)

I think we must be prepared in parliament, in a non-partisan way to look at this policy; we should keep it under review and I think that we should remember that if we do not do so, various emotional arguments made against it will escalate. Those who oppose this policy, whether from one linguistic camp or the other, will be armed increasingly in their opposition to it.

I should like to review very briefly, Mr. Speaker, what are the real problems which lie at the back of the present malaise, fear and uncertainty regarding the application of the policy in the public service. First and foremost, is the fact that the pledge which was given by two prime ministers, Mr. Pearson in 1966 and the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in 1968, was not realized in fact. They said, in effect, that the career of any public servant who was not bilingual would not be prejudiced by reason of the application of this policy. Actually, this has not happened. The highest organ of the Public Service Commission has said that that is not what the law says. They have said, further, that it does not really matter whether parliament was induced to pass this law by reason of the undertakings given by those prime ministers because they, the appellate organ of the Civil Service Commission, are not bound by these undertakings. Indeed, it is now said that the protection to be accorded to public servants is only this: they will not be dismissed or demoted if they are not bilingual. That is quite different, in my judgment, from the original undertaking which said that their career opportunities would not be prejudiced.

I suspect, as I have contended elsewhere, that our main problems with the policy arise in this area, since there is no right on the part of public servants to appeal against the basic determinations which say that certain posts are to be bilingual. These determinations fall outside the total appellate process. Those who say that there are no real complaints, that there are not a large number of examples of protest against the policy, should also add that there is no way for people affected by it to protest effectively.