

[English]

To summarize, we do not seek a public service in which most men and women are individually bilingual. This approach would obviously be the wrong one since the vast majority of Canadians do not speak two official languages. Rather, we wish to create a public service that is functionally bilingual—that is one in which most men and women will be able to work, to function, in whichever official language they choose.

Let me assure the House that we have not the slightest intention or desire ever to impose a second official language on any Canadian who does not wish to speak one. While the phrase may sound a bit awkward, there is really nothing mysterious or frightening about what we call “functional bilingualism”. It will not take anything away from anyone. It will give something very desirable to all of us, to the Canadian speaking only English and to the Canadian speaking only French. It will give us a public service in which all of us can work in the language that comes most naturally to us as individual men and women, a public service from which all of us can obtain essential government services in our own language. Is that bad? Is it a policy to make any of us fearful? I do not think so, and that is why I commend this resolution to every member of this House and to all the Canadian people.

As the resolution recognizes, most Canadians have not had a need or an opportunity to learn both official languages. With this in mind, the government proposes that those who are unilingual, as well as those who are already bilingual, be able to compete as equals for any bilingual position open to public competition. They can do so on the understanding that, should a unilingual candidate be selected for a bilingual post, he or she will take up to a year of language training—at public expense—to develop whatever degree of second language proficiency is required. This measure is for the benefit of both unilingual English speaking and unilingual French speaking Canadians, and will apply to them of course without distinction.

The principles embodied in today's resolution also deal with those already working for the government. In this 1966 statement which established the government's basic position on bilingualism in the public service, prime minister Pearson promised that the careers of unilingual public servants:

... who have devoted many years of their lives to the service of their country must not be prejudiced in any way by measures to develop bilingualism.

From the outset, our language policy has been elaborated within that spirit. I am aware, however, that many doubts have arisen among unilingual public servants in part because the 1966 promise was general in nature.

In contrast, today's resolution is quite specific. It states that unilingual public servants will be given at least one year's notice of the bilingual designation of their posts. They will have an opportunity to take language training—also at public expense—or to transfer to a unilingual position at no loss of salary.

What if someone should decline language training or be unsuccessful at it, and also refuse a transfer? If all that befalls, him, he may remain in his post if he wishes to and we will make administrative arrangements to ensure that

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the bilingual needs of his office are met. In other words, no public servant will be removed from his position by virtue of our implementation of the principles. We wish to provide an extra measure of protection for public servants who had ten years of continuous service as of the date of Mr. Pearson's statement, April 6, 1966, and who have been continuously employed in the public service since that time. Even though they are unilingual and wish to remain unilingual they will have the right to apply for positions identified as bilingual, but not yet formally designated as bilingual.

● (1650)

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I have described in some detail the safeguards we are providing to protect the interests of unilingual public servants. These safeguards will apply to both English and French-speaking public servants, but in terms of numbers will most help the English-speaking group. Now let me turn more specifically to the primary interest of French-speaking Canadians: Are public service careers becoming available to them on the basis of equality? I know that some people—pointing to the targets previously set for 1975, and the new deadline of 1978—have charged that today's resolution represents a retreat from our objectives, or a delay in implementation of our policies. This is simply not the case. On the contrary, we cannot meet our new objectives for 1978 unless, at a minimum, we meet the targets previously set for 1975. The President of the Treasury Board will explain this question in detail. I would like at this time only to impress one crucial point upon this House:

I do not regard the achievement of a functionally bilingual public service as a vague and distant desideratum. I regard it as a very concrete matter; I regard it as having immediate importance to the well-being of our country as a whole—and of millions of our citizens as individuals.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we would be blind not to recognize that many French-speaking Canadians still do not regard the federal Public Service as “theirs”. That many of them feel the federal government “belongs to the anglophone”, because it still largely speaks in English, and works in English. With the cooperation and goodwill of our public servants, we have already made a certain amount of progress towards changing this situation. Now we must call upon ourselves to do more.

That is why the second part of today's resolution refers to specific measures to increase the use of French in the public service, and to enhance public service career opportunities for French-speaking Canadians. Where appropriate, we are increasing the number of French Language Units. We are undertaking further measures to increase recruitment of francophones. So that these recruits may compete as equals for promotion within the public service, we are increasing the number of professional training programs offered in French. And we will seek progressively more effective action, in consultation with provincial and municipal authorities, to enhance the bilingual character of the National Capital Region.

For just a moment, let me also recall that the first part—the “basic principles”—of the resolution are of at least equal importance from the point of view of a unilingual