

Official Languages

abroad, should be made available in both official languages. This means, for example, that Canadian diplomatic, consular and immigration offices, as well as the Canadian National Railways and Air Canada, will have to provide services in both languages throughout the world, except where the demand for such services is extremely limited. We shall thus present, both within Canada and abroad, a true reflection of the bilingual country we are in the process of creating.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pelletier: Similarly, there are a number of provisions affecting the courts. All federal agencies of a judicial or quasi-judicial nature, and all courts dealing with criminal matters, will have to ensure that persons testifying before them are able to do so in either of the official languages. Every federal court of record will have to provide interpretation services at the request of a party to the proceedings, except in cases where the court is satisfied that the absence of an interpreter will not place the party concerned at a disadvantage, or where the court finds it impossible to obtain such services, after taking all reasonable steps in an attempt to do so.

Finally, the bill deals with the appointment and duties of a Commissioner of official languages for Canada who will be, like the Auditor General, a servant of parliament, and not subject to the authority of the executive. The Commissioner will be responsible for ensuring that the status of both official languages is recognized in practice, and that the spirit of the law and the intention of the legislator are respected in their entirety. The Commissioner will have power of inquiry and of intervention in order to satisfy himself that the spirit of the law is being respected in matters involving the conduct of the affairs of parliament, or the activities of the Canadian government or any other federal agency. He will submit an annual report to parliament, but he will be free to make a special report whenever he thinks fit. In other words, he will be the guardian of the language rights of the citizen in the latter's dealings with parliament or the federal government, or, to borrow a term used by the Royal Commission, he will act as a "linguistic ombudsman".

[*English*]

Those, Mr. Speaker, are the most important provisions of the bill now before the house.

As I have already stressed, the bill represents in itself nothing more than a new point of departure as far as the official languages

are concerned. However, if the provinces adopt, as we hope they will, the legislative and administrative measures advocated by the Royal Commission, a great deal more will have to be done. The commission strongly recommended that the use of either language, and the right to education in either language, be guaranteed by constitutional means. This bill, I repeat, does not amend the constitution, although the federal government has begun a dialogue with the provinces on that subject. Constitutional guarantees affecting language use and education are not a mere formality. On the contrary, they are of vital importance if we are to ensure the inviolability of the language rights of minority groups and if we wish to forge really strong links between French speaking and English speaking Canadians.

The bill does not cover the possible forms of future federal government assistance to the provinces, but we have already put forward a number of proposals in this regard. Nor does the bill deal with the status or the future of the National Capital Region. This matter was the subject of one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism; it is now being studied by a preparatory committee whose work, as yet unfinished, also covers many related subjects.

Such subjects are outside the scope of this bill. Its provisions will nevertheless establish the language rights of the French and English minorities in Canada. Full implementation will take time, and the necessary delay is provided for. Time, however, is not the only requirement; another is money. The government nevertheless believes that statutory recognition of language rights is well worth both the time and the money. The bill will assure the French speaking minorities in New Brunswick, Manitoba, Ontario and elsewhere that their case has been heard and that they have the right to deal with the federal government in their own language in all bilingual districts and in the national capital region, a right that also applies to all Canadians when they travel abroad. The bill offers an identical guarantee to the English speaking minorities in Quebec, a guarantee that has long since been honoured by that province.

The entrenchment of these rights is imperative. They must be recognized by the law of the land. The time is ripe, and we must put an end to all hesitation.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, it is important that this bill be accorded its rightful place in the Canadian