

the public but also in carrying out the work of federal institutions. That is a very important principle, and it has had the effect of giving Anglophones and Francophones equal status within the Public Service. Before 1969 that did not exist.

Madam Speaker, I am sure you remember when, for instance at CN, everything was in English, and when government cheques were in English only. All that has changed.

An Hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Cassidy: Other things still need to be changed, but we have nevertheless made a big step forward.

However, whether French or English speaking and whatever their language of work, young people are still unsure about finding a job in the government of Canada. Madam Speaker, this is a principle I cannot accept. But this is what the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Assiniboine is proposing.

As I said, I deeply regret the statement made by this Hon. Member. Madam Speaker, I deplore that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) is keeping silent. He has not condemned the very negative and destructive series of amendments put forward by many of the government Members. I am sorry that the Secretary of State (Mr. Bouchard) failed to intervene, in spite of his responsibilities towards bilingualism, and that he chose to go on holidays instead of getting involved in this matter in order to give some leadership.

● (1620)

[English]

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, on two separate occasions within the last couple of minutes the Member has made reference to the absence of Members of this House, and that is clearly against the Standing Orders. I would ask that the Chair bring that to his attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): I am sure that the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) does know the normal way of the House, which is not to mention the presence or absence of Hon. Members, but what I have heard, in French, was not the Hon. Member mentioning the presence or absence in the House of Hon. Members. This is what I have heard. This is why I did not make any comment.

[Translation]

Mr. Cassidy: Thank you, Madam Speaker, if I have referred to a member absent from the House, I made a mistake. I wanted to refer to the silence of the Secretary of State on this matter and to the fact that the government seems to be tolerating the behaviour of some of its important members, and even some of its ministers, allowing them to take a stand against a basic policy of the government.

Madam Speaker, our time is limited, but I would also like to mention an issue which seems to be of concern to Canadians, the problems facing the language teachers who have now been on strike or locked out for a period of eight to nine months,

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who are being asked by the Treasury Board to work five more hours a week and who would see their capability to teach in both official languages diminished. The four amendments in front of us do not directly, but indirectly, relate to that clause. The member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) wants to know if we think the Act must ensure the strengthening of the equal status of both languages, Madam Speaker, and that is a very important matter. On the one hand, the government says he is for the official languages principle, but, on the other hand, he does nothing to implement this principle and does not react to the concerns of the French speaking community, and of Quebecers. But when the defender of the rights of the French-speaking Canadians, the new minister who has just joined us, keeps quiet on this issue, I think we are entitled to ask ourselves some questions and to feel concerned, Madam Speaker.

[English]

I just want to say, finally, that in the committee a substantial number of adjustments and changes were made to this Bill. They were made in an effort to try to accommodate some of the concerns that have been expressed by different Members, including some constituents in my riding of Ottawa Centre, and there was an honest effort at compromise and in finding constructive solutions to the concerns being expressed by members from the Conservative back benches and from time to time by constituents of mine in Ottawa Centre or elsewhere.

To come at the last minute with this lengthy series of amendments, which at one time or another suggested that the Armed Forces should be English only, that the National Capital Region's language of work should be English, that the basic commitment to bilingualism should be reversed or should be undermined, at a time when we know that it is fundamental to our country and fundamental to keeping the country together, is not playing fair.

I hope that Canadians who are watching this debate realize what we are talking about here. This began as an effort by the Government, I believe, to reinforce the principle of official bilingualism. Unfortunately, it has turned into a sorry and distressing and regrettable affair in which one is forced to question the commitment of the Government to the concept and principle of bilingualism because of the degree to which they have allowed two messages to go out.

When the Member for Winnipeg—Assiniboine (Mr. McKenzie) presents himself in the election next time, will he be supporting the Government's policy of bilingualism or will he in fact be against? No matter how he votes tonight or how he votes tomorrow, a Parliamentary Secretary, without being disciplined, will have been allowed to have raised serious questions which indicate that he is not at all in sympathy with the basic tenet of government policy, and that I believe to be unacceptable.

I think I would apply the same comments to one of the Vice-Chairmen of the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages, who is another of this group of 15 back-benchers