

*Supply*

regard in which the Fathers of Confederation held the notion of association.

In fact, the foundation of the official languages concept dates back to the birth of this country. In 1867, considering this notion as essential to the survival of Confederation, our forefathers passed the Constitution Act whose Section 133 recognizes everyone's right to use French or English in the debates, acts, records and journals of the Parliament of Canada and the legislature of Quebec, as well as before any Canadian or Quebec court.

I should point out that the current policy on official languages is based on this legislative framework.

[English]

Provision for the payment of a bonus to candidates who could write in both of Canada's official languages was first made in the act amending the Civil Service Act in 1888. This bilingualism bonus, which is still paid today to employees whose position requires knowledge of both official languages, is received by only 30 per cent of public servants. Most employees of the public service are not bilingual and do not automatically have to become so to have access to other jobs, contrary to popular belief.

By the end of the 1800s the key federal institutions gradually began to reflect the linguistic duality of the country. In the provinces however the situation was quite different, particularly where education was concerned. Although the language question initially was not particularly controversial, the open mindedness displayed by the federal public service toward the official languages does not seem to have extended to the provinces.

The politicians of the day did not show the same wisdom as the Fathers of Confederation and did not respect the spirit of Confederation in language and education, a situation that the minority French speaking communities would denounce and would later try to remedy.

In 1927—I mention this in passing—the first bilingual postage stamps were issued to mark the 60th anniversary of Confederation and this practice would subsequently become standard.

• (1245)

The federal government translation bureau was established in 1934 and was to change the face of the Public Service of Canada. However, official acceptance of the general principle that every citizen should have the right to receive federal services in the language of his or her choice and that the federal public service should reflect the makeup of Canadian society came only in the 1960s with the Heeney report and the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

[Translation]

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was a turning point for official languages. It noted that Canada was undergoing the most severe crisis in its history. So, it recommended among other things that governments contribute to the development of official languages minority groups and that the civil service be bilingual with regard to both provision of services and language of work.

Following up on the royal commission's recommendations, the government of the day adopted the Official Languages Act in 1969, thereby making French and English the official languages of Canada.

I would like to stress one point at this time, especially after hearing remarks made by our colleagues from the Reform Party.

[English]

This act did not seek to make all Canadians bilingual. Its main objective was to establish the equality of status of English and French in the public service. It provided for the delivery of services in both languages so that the government could better understand and be better understood by the public. Whatever may be said, this is still the case today. No one wants to force any member of the public to speak both English and French.

The progress made possible by the passage of the Official Languages Act did not come without some difficulties along the way, but it proved to be very positive. Francophones have been the first to benefit from the act. It declared that the official languages, French and English, are the very essence of our identity as Canadians and that it is important to promote their development in all the provinces and territories of the country. This to my mind represents unprecedented progress.

After its adoption in 1969 the Official Languages Act gathered ground in the provinces. That same year New Brunswick declared itself officially bilingual in a unanimous resolution. We are now at the 25th anniversary.

A few years later other provinces followed suit. They relaxed their legislation and gave back to French speaking Canadians the right to education in their language, something that had been prohibited at the turn of the century as I mentioned earlier, notably in Manitoba.

[Translation]

During the seventies, Canadians showed a growing desire to live in an open and tolerant society, a society concerned with allowing individuals to live in their own culture and language. Young people, for instance, proved to be increasingly interested