

*Official Languages Act*

If the Hon. Member for Athabasca (Mr. Shields) has been reported correctly in the press, and this was of course one of those leaks from the Conservative caucus, as it happens, he recognized as a result of a drive through rural Québec in which he needed help and discovered people who did not speak English, that there are persons who do not know the language which prevails in an area and surely the Government of Canada has an obligation to serve those persons in the language that they do know.

It seems to me ultimately outrageous that we will not use the facilities of the Government, we might not on the view of these persons make language training available or hire persons who are not fluent in both languages in order to serve these people but we will instead—and I speak now for the English-speaking majority who take this particular view—demand that all of those persons become bilingual themselves through whatever means possible at whatever difficulty, if they are to deal with the Government of Canada. That seems to me so monstrously unfair that I cannot believe that any Canadian with whatever view of this country could really persist in a rejection of the policy and say that the Government of Canada should not make that effort, take that extra step to ensure that the official language minority in an area is able to obtain services in its own language.

The reality, of course, is that the Government of Canada has since 1969 been committed to the policy and has generally acted on it. I want to suggest, however, that in ensuring that the Public Service is capable of serving the minority, there are some very real concerns, and one of them deserves to be stated here this afternoon. While committed to the policy, and the Bill we have been considering represents a significant renewal of the policy of official bilingualism, there are still some very grave shortcomings in the teaching of the language to members of the Public Service and in the provision of interpretation services.

● (1240)

The government's commitment has not really been reflected in practice. There has been a reduction in the number of interpreters and an increase in their workload. There has been privatization of a substantial part of the translation service in order to reduce costs, in spite of concern about the effect this will have on the quality of translations.

Language teachers in the public service have been forced to work for almost two years without a new collective agreement. Faced with demands for an increase in the amount of teaching that they do every week, they will of course have to reduce their preparation time. An increase from 20 to 25 hours a week represents a very significant change in the working conditions of these teachers.

I think this is a matter of considerable concern because speaking for, if you will, the English speaking majority of the country who are concerned about what will happen in the public service, they want the assurance that they will be able to

obtain the kind of language instruction that they need in order to provide the kind of service to the French speaking minorities of the country that our policy envisions. If they are not able to obtain the kind of instruction that hones their skills and targets well the kind of service they are required to provide, then the policy to which we are committed in principle is not being fully achieved in practice. Although that may in a sense be in parenthesis in our general consideration of the Bill, it is a concern that I want to underscore for the Secretary of State (Mr. Bouchard), who is in the House this afternoon, and for others concerned, the President of the Treasury Board (Miss Carney) and so on.

As I have already indicated, in the years since 1969 we have seen an acceptance of the policy of official bilingualism. It is tempting to review how that happened, to refer to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the Act of 1969, and recognize, as the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) did, the policy of multiculturalism stated in 1971 in this chamber and its acceptance by all Parties, and to recognize the movement toward recognition of aboriginal self-government. All of those are aspects of the building of a new Canada on which we have been embarked since the 1960s. It is that voyage that is of such crucial importance to this policy and this Bill.

The fact that there are still some Members in this House who speak for another view and wear the dinosaur button proudly is an indication that they speak for a dying view, I suppose I am not sure there were dinosaurs around when the sheep and mice wanted to enjoy the earth, but without elaborating on that, I think there is a growing number of people in this country who accept the policy and want it to flourish. I want to say to them and to all of us here that it is imperative that this Bill receive passage here and in the other place and be proclaimed. It is necessary in order to renew official bilingualism and establish the policy across the country. It is necessary for various reasons. It is necessary in order to have a footing on which to stand if one wants to express concern, as someone said yesterday, about the rights of the English-speaking minority in Québec and the impact of Bill 101.

It is surely to be profoundly regretted that the Conservative Government of Bill Davis in Ontario never took the step of making the province officially bilingual back in the 1970s. Who knows, it might have changed the history of Québec in additional creative ways. It is surely to be regretted that the Conservative opposition in Manitoba fought the attempt of the Manitoba NDP Government to implement what eventually became the declaration of the Supreme Court of Canada. It is surely to be regretted that Conservative Governments in Saskatchewan and Alberta have finally recognized that there is an official bilingual reality in their provinces, only to then largely do away with it.