

TRANSLATION SYSTEM

The Prime Minister introduced a motion in the House of Commons, August 11, for the installation of a simultaneous translation system.

Mr. Diefenbaker said, "For quite a number of years, Mr. Speaker, from time to time there have been representations made on behalf of the establishment in this chamber of a simultaneous translation system. This goes back some years, and I recall that in 1952 or 1953 it was rumoured that consideration was being given to action in this regard. However, nothing was done during the intervening years, though on more than one occasion various members advocated the necessity of the establishment of such a system, to the end that members in the House would be able to follow and understand everything that was being said by the member who, at the moment was speaking. As you will recall, on November 25, 1957, the then hon. member for Joliette-L'Assomption-Montcalm moved:

'That, in the opinion of this House, the Government should take into consideration the advisability of setting up a special committee of Parliament for the purpose of considering the establishment of a system of simultaneous translation--'

"Various hon. members spoke on that occasion. The essence of the motion was that a committee of Parliament give consideration to the establishment of the system in question.

"As all hon. members know, simultaneous translation has been in effect in the United Nations since that body was established, according to the information I have as well as in this chamber in the Autumn of 1957 when the International Postal Congress met here. With regard to the latter experience I am going to say nothing. That matter was dealt with at length during the course of the debate to which I have referred and which took place in this House respecting the setting up of the Committee. It was dealt with at length by the then Postmaster General, who pointed out the benefits of the plan and also some of the inherent difficulties that were experienced by that Conference.

"As far back as May 22, 1956, the Junior Chamber of Commerce in a brief delivered to the then Speaker of the House of Commons, advocated such a system as well. I have before me an extract from the Department of Public Information of the United Nations in which there is a general summary of the technique applied in that chamber. It says:

'The official languages of the General Assembly--and of the United Nations--are Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish; the working languages are English, French and Spanish.

'A system of simultaneous interpretation is used in the General Assembly auditorium, council chambers and most of the committee rooms. Listeners are provided with earphones which they may tune in to any one of the five official languages.'

However, it says this also: 'An interpreter does not translate literally; he renders into another language the ideas and arguments of the speaker, in the speaker's order.

'At meetings where the traditional consecutive method of interpretation is used, the speaker's remarks are translated after he has completed his speech.'

"Even there, as was pointed out during the debate last fall, it has been found difficult to secure the necessary technological skill in translating ability which will permit of simultaneous translation taking place. Because of that fact and in order to assure that if this motion is passed those who will be appointed to discharge the duties and responsibilities in connection with translation may be qualified and trained accordingly, action to this end has been taken. Such action, however, is on a provisional basis pending the outcome of the motion before the House.

"Mr. Speaker, as one who through the years has tried to develop some facility in speaking the French language, though without what might be called mediocre success, I have come to a point where I can, speaking generally, follow debates in French provided there are not too many interruptions and dependent also upon the velocity with which the speaker delivers his speech. I can fully understand the position of French speaking members who, I think I can say with entire truthfulness, have on many occasions expressed their feelings on this subject in the course of speeches in this House. They have explained their difficulties in fully expressing themselves in the English language, which course has been made necessary by the large percentage of English speaking members.

"There is general agreement that this Assembly, now considering this motion, is under our constitution entirely bilingual in character."