

Bilingualism and Bi-culturalism

There is another area in which the Commission has specific statutory responsibilities and in which it intends to provide positive leadership. I refer to the question of bilingualism and bi-culturalism in the Public Service. The Commission does not have jurisdiction in all the areas from which contributions will have to be made if a satisfactory solution to this problem is ever to be reached. However, in the context of the national requirement to preserve and strengthen Canadian unity and identity, the Commission is resolved to apply all the solutions that lie within its power. In addition, the Commission hopes that others concerned will also apply to the problem all the energies and resources at their disposal.

No one will disagree, I am sure, with the notion that the execution of public policy in Canada deserves the best minds and the highest executive, administrative and professional skills available in the land. The Civil Service Act recognizes this requirement and makes provision for its fulfilment. However, it is an unfortunate fact that the Public Service of Canada has up to now been unable to attract and retain its fair share of competent persons reflecting the two cultures of Canada. We have not succeeded in recruiting, particularly for intermediate and senior positions, a sufficient number of well-qualified citizens from French Canada and it is the Commission's view that this vacuum is detrimental to the public interest. (External Affairs is unusual in the fact that a substantial proportion of its officers are French-speaking Canadians.) It is serious because to a significant degree the formulation and execution of public policy is deprived of the benefit of different cultural approaches, with all that this would imply for more dynamic, imaginative and effective service to the population of this country.

The changes that will have to be brought about in order to achieve bilingualism and bi-culturalism in the Public Service are numerous and difficult, and for this reason, the required administrative action must be well considered and appropriate to the issues to which it is applied. The changes to be effected must take the form of an evolution consistent with the broad development of our Canadian society through formal and mass media education.

It must be made clear to all concerned that the Commission cannot and does not contemplate a situation where Canadian citizens who are not bilingual are denied a place in the Public Service, and we must guard against prejudicing the position of people already in the Service. At the same time, we must ensure that they are fully aware of the objectives in this important area and the special measures being initiated in order that they many participate fully in the opportunities of the future.