

Bilingual Districts

My question is this: In those areas of Canada where additional languages have, by the evolution of time, acquired rights and uses in the public service in the dealing of people with the Government of Canada, is the implementation of this bilingual districts program likely to derogate in any way from the continued use and growth of any additional language or languages in that bilingual district?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that is no. It is not the intention, either of the Official Languages Act or this report, or the intention of the government in relation to it, that bilingual districts should have that effect; nor will the program be allowed in any way to derogate from the rights, customary or statutory, acquired by any other language or language group in Canada.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): A supplementary question. The reason I ask the question stems from the implementation of, shall I say, any minority language working unit where there is now within the complement of the federal service a sufficient number of employees that it is determined there should be a French or English or minority language working unit. In most cases it will be a French language working unit. In order to preserve the additional language capability of the service, will there be a requirement to add personnel to the office or establish the French language unit in, say, a city like Edmonton, in a post office, where Ukrainian is an essential language for serving the public?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid the hon. gentleman has confused me a little. The creation and operation of units of work in which the working language is French does not, by definition, call for additional people. It merely establishes an understanding whereby the people in that unit will be able to work more efficiently in a particular language, in this case French, than they can in English. It has nothing to do at all with the speaking of a variety of other languages and the provision of services in those languages to the public.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Acting President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury), which I think is what he is today, if the government is prepared to affirm that it stands by the position set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 of the report, to the effect that the purpose of bilingual districts is to impose an obligation on the government, not an obligation on the public? Does the government also stand by the principle established in paragraph 9 that the creation of bilingual districts does not carry with it a requirement that the public servants in those districts be or become bilingual?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, I think the point raised by the hon. gentleman is a very important one. I hope that readers of the report will pay particular attention to this underlying principle against which the whole report should be seen and which consequently is the basis upon which we are establishing and intending to proclaim these bilingual districts. I am not sure I agree entirely with his interpretation of paragraph 9 when he says that—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should have put in the word

[Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West).]

“all”—that it is not a requirement that all public servants in the district be or become bilingual?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, with the addition of “all” I have no trouble at all in agreeing with the important point the hon. member has made, namely, that the purpose of the bilingual districts and the purpose of the proclamation of bilingual districts is to ensure in a formal way that the federal government and its offices will have the capacity to deliver services in either of the two official languages to those of the public who apply. Rather than forcing bilingualism upon the public, it enables them to continue to deal with the federal government in the official language of their choice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. As I mentioned at the outset of the afternoon sitting, Mr. Speaker did suggest that I recognize four questioners, and this I have done. I would be ready to recognize two more on very short questions, because two additional members are standing up, the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro) and the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker). I hope questions and answers will be short because questions and answers generate other questions. I will then call orders of the day.

● (1420)

Mr. Watson: Mr. Speaker, during this morning's session, when Mr. Speaker made reference to the questioning this afternoon, it was my understanding there would be no limitation on the questions. There are numbers on this side of the House who have questions, and I feel there should not be a limitation in respect of a matter as important as this one.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I intended to raise this point at the end of whatever the question period might be. I object to the fact that Your Honour has not, in fact, agreed or tacitly supported the position the Speaker took shortly before lunch. At the time there were a number of members standing, whose names he called. I had the floor at the time and I expected your bias to show in that regard, and when you did not recognize me I did not rise again. But, I, as a member, object violently to this arrangement where an agreement is not honoured by Mr. Speaker because the Speaker may have changed, and also to the bias that is becoming pretty evident from my own point of view in this regard.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Chair does not accept the last part of the remarks of the hon. member. I think it is a reflection on the Chair and the occupant of the chair.

An hon. Member: It is, and it was meant to be.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think it is something the hon. member should consider withdrawing both as far as the Chair is concerned as well as the present occupant of the chair.

In addition, I wish to reply to the first point raised by the hon. member for Laprairie (Mr. Watson). I did not mention the Standing Order, but it does provide for the Chair to decide how long the question period should last. It is not the responsibility of the Chair to decide whether an