

Official Languages

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): It is so ordered.

[*Editor's Note: For text of amendments see appendix.*]

[*Translation*]

Mr. Asselin: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): The hon. member for Charlevoix on a point of order.

Mr. Asselin: I should like to know whether the minister can provide the opposition with a copy of the amendments he has just tabled, for we shall have to study them. After the minister has finished his speech, some hon. members from other parties might wish to speak and give their views on the amendments. Has the minister got some copies for the opposition parties?

Mr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, there is a good number of copies available for those who wish to examine the amendments.

[*English*]

Mr. Diefenbaker: The press has copies, so I suppose they can also be made available to us.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): The purpose of tabling this document is so that members will have a copy.

I think that the package of amendments will demonstrate just what is involved here in terms of change and will show, I hope, the government's flexibility in relation to the problem of the implementation of the bill. I want to reiterate that the bill has not been diluted in principle, that the amendments proposed affect both English speaking and French speaking Canadians, and that there is a balance in the amendments proposed which represents and reflects that delicate equilibrium which is part of Canadian national unity.

Essentially, sir, these changes break down into three categories. The first category is composed of technical amendments which we felt would clarify the bill. I do not think I need dwell on these. The second category includes those amendments directed to improving the bill from the point of view of implementation. They have been designed largely with reference to comments received from the Attorneys General of the provinces, in particular the western provinces, Nova Scotia and Quebec. Finally, there is a category of amendments that has some policy

[*The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard).*]

dimensions which we felt would clarify the objectives sought to be achieved in the bill and would add something to the fundamentals of the bill. Amendments that are designed to improve the implementation of the bill involve a clarification of the situation in which court judgments must be rendered in both languages. I refer to clause 5 (1). They refer also to a situation where legislative instruments may be impugned for want of a second language version—clause 6—and in what circumstances regard must be had for both versions of an enactment.

It is felt that these changes, without touching in any way the principles of the bill, will make its implementation easier in some cases and clearer in others. It has not been the government's intention that public offices outside the national capital region or outside bilingual districts need, as a general rule, provide services to the public in both official languages. We therefore intend to modify the legislation to make this clear, and this is the reason for the amendment to clause 9(1). At the same time, however, we felt it important to stress that bilingualism in terms of the provision of services is not to be restricted to bilingual districts where there is a demonstrated need for it. Hon. members should refer to the new clause 9(2). This was perhaps the major issue that I discussed with Prime Minister Bertrand in Quebec city. We are therefore going to propose—and this amendment will touch on a question of policy not fully set out in the bill previously—that government departments and crown corporations be obliged, in the case of a significant demand for second language services, to provide such services notwithstanding the fact that the location in question may not be within a bilingual district.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, we do not want to create linguistic ghettos. We are aware of the opposition expressed against the bilingual district concept, though this would represent in our opinion the best way to protect minorities wherever they may be.

But in order to widen the scope of bilingualism within the federal institutions, we think that it is important to emphasize that the duties and responsibilities of departments and other federal bodies are not limited exclusively to bilingual districts.

The government has therefore decided to bring in an amendment to the bill with