

BILINGUALISM

ANNOUNCEMENT OF EXTENSION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM TO YUKON AND NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Hon. James Hugh Faulkner (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, I wish to announce today that the federal-provincial program on bilingualism in education has been extended to include the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

Because of the population differences between the Territories and the provinces, the program is a special arrangement in providing assistance to meet a unique situation. The federal government will assist the Territories with the supplementary costs of providing additional second language instruction in the school system over a five-year period. A total of \$300,000 has been earmarked for both territories for the fiscal year 1974-75.

The Yukon and Northwest Territories intend to increase the amount of French being taught as a second language, and are interested in establishing resource centres where appropriate measures will also be taken to improve second language teacher training and the teaching methods employed. In this connection two special projects have already been approved, one of \$53,000 for the Yukon and another of \$67,000 for the Northwest Territories.

[Translation]

I consider, Mr. Speaker, that the extension of the federal-provincial program on bilingualism in education, to include the Yukon and Northwest Territories, bears an historical significance. The inter-governmental co-operation in matters of second language teaching is no longer limited to the federal-provincial scene; it now includes federal-territorial arrangements.

Part of the funds available for these special projects will be used for teaching and materials. The costs of student and teacher exchanges will also be covered by the grants. An improved contact with the French language is thus promoted and a more dynamic approach to the second language is foreseen.

[English]

Let me take this opportunity to reiterate my firm belief that the teaching of our two official languages in our schools is the catalyst of national unity and solidarity. The study of the second language in each Canadian province and territory is an essential step toward mutual understanding between Canadians from all parts of the country.

I should like at this time to express my great satisfaction that federal support has been extended to the Territories in order that these Canadian citizens may take advantage of the language programs administered by my department.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, the minister's announcement is, of course, welcome. My only concern is that it took some two years for the government to realize that people north of the sixtieth parallel are in fact part of this country, are in fact Canadians and are in fact entitled to participate fully in this kind of program. I hope the minister responsible for DREE will wake up one of these days and realize that we are part of Canada and should be able to participate in his national program as well.

Bilingualism in Education

One of the difficulties in this kind of program is that in the north we are dealing with vast distances. The Yukon with its 207,000 square miles and the Northwest Territories with its 1,300,000 square miles have schools scattered throughout these areas. It would cost a relatively lesser amount to implement a program such as this in the south. The very nature of the geographic distances with which we are dealing in the north are such as to require a duplication of facilities which would not be required in the south. Therefore, I am in some considerable degree of doubt as to the amounts that are being set aside accomplishing the very desirable objective that the minister has stated.

● (1440)

However, I should inform him that unlike a good many areas in the south we are considerably ahead in regard to second language teaching. It is now mandatory as low as grade 6, and in some schools as low as grade 4, and I believe this sets some kind of record compared with other southern areas. I have been one who, for a good many years now, has been advocating this kind of program. Indeed, as far back as 1960 I was saying in the House and elsewhere that the kind of program that is being carried out now, and is belatedly being extended to other sectors in the north, is a program that will bring about the kind of unity which we in this country all desire to see.

One last word, Mr. Speaker, in this connection. It is sad to see the culture of the north, based as it is on the language of the indigenous peoples, disappearing. I speak of those whose culture is based on the Louscheaux tongue, like my colleague from the Northwest Territories (Mr. Firth), on the Slavey, on the Dog Rib, on the Cree. These are the only people in this country, it seems to me, who are being left out of the whole picture in programs of this nature. Their purpose is the preservation of the identity and the culture of Canadians, in this case the first Canadians.

I, personally, am not too impressed with the benefits to be derived from the moneys going into the multicultural program. I would far sooner see, as a northerner of many, many years standing, and as one who is close to the feelings and desires of the native peoples of the north, some effort being made to preserve their culture through the preservation of their language, which is rapidly disappearing in a society which seems to be devoted entirely to integrating and assimilating the culture of the native people. If only we would look at their problems in the same light as we look at the problems of French and English Canada, then perhaps we would be doing a service not only to those who deserve to have their culture preserved but to ourselves as well.

Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to express a few words regarding the minister's announcement and at the same time to thank the minister for giving notice of his announcement. I welcome the announcement on behalf of the New Democratic Party, but more so on behalf of the people of the Northwest Territories. These people are already bilingual to a large extent. Many of my constituents speak two of ten and even 12 languages, five or six major dialects in Inuktitut, and four major dialects in the Indian language.