

it. Not long afterward, the official got a note of thanks from the young man whose form he had torn up—in English.

For Mr. Spicer, the word that sums up this settlement is civilized—a word that he returned to frequently during a long conversation about his office.

He said, for example, that his most important role is to help make a more civilized climate of dialogue among Canadians. He feels Canadians only have three or four years to show that such a civilized dialogue is possible if bilingualism is not to lose its credibility.

Mr. Spicer has not yet used his extraordinary investigative powers that allow him, among other things, to accept evidence that would not be admissible in a court of law and to enter almost any premises occupied by federal institutions.

In line with the low-key approach, he wanted the complaints section of his office to be called the conciliation service. This was frustrated by Public Service Commission classifications of employees which reserves the conciliation designation for conciliation officers in the Labour Department.

But the Chief of the Complaints Service is literally a diplomat—Marcel Blais, who began his career in the External Affairs Department, before moving on to other jobs in the Quebec and federal public services.

The Air Canada controversy involved the Special Studies Service whole mandate and can be compared with preventive medicine. Special studies officers survey particular departments and agencies to assess their strengths and weaknesses, in terms of bilingualism, and to suggest how they can avoid pitfalls.

There are varying accounts of the incident, but it is clear that an official from the Special Studies Service went to Air Canada's Ottawa Airport ticket counter December 14 and spoke to workers there in French, recording the conversation on tape.

Mr. Spicer explained that Air Canada employees were to have been warned of the experimental testing, but due to misunderstanding between himself and Air Canada management the warning was not given.

"I immediately stopped the experiment as unacceptable. No names of employees were taken," he said.

There are 12 officers in the Special Studies Service, compared with eight in the Complaints Service. Over the next few years they will be surveying bilingualism among 172 agencies or departments. So far they have completed three studies, are working on seven, and have eight more in the planning stages.

"I know this is not going to be my last mistake. I'm resigned to that," Mr. Spicer said of the Air Canada incident.

Could Be Controversial

The next controversy could come over a poster that has been prepared, telling people about his office. "Now you're talking," says the English caption, with a pretty girl pointing her finger forward. "And Parliament has given you a sympathetic listener—a 'language ombudsman'," it goes on.

"His job is to uphold the equality of English and French as official languages in all federal agencies and crown corporations. If you have any comments and problems, he's all ears."

The text went through various drafts to make it as inoffensive as possible and it has been read to civil service union leaders who gave it their blessing. But Mr. Spicer is still concerned that he will be accused of looking for trouble.

The poster is to be distributed gradually, starting in about a month in Ottawa and spreading into the bilingual districts where federal services are to be made available in both languages starting later this year.

Other ombudsmen have found that the volume of complaints is closely related to the amount of publicity given their offices and the poster may produce an increase.

They are now coming in at a rate of two or three a day. Not surprisingly, about a quarter are from English-speaking Canadians and the rest from French Canadian—almost the reverse of the proportions of English-speaking Canadians and French Canadians in the population.

There are a number of complaints that Mr. Spicer can do nothing about—like the one from Montreal which charged that a particular play-