

Adjournment Debate

ii) applications for exemption from level B linguistic proficiency requirements concerning appointees at the position of Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) in the National Capital Region.

And Deputy Ministers were invited to deal directly with the Public Service Commission which, in turn, and I quote: "which, in turn, would report to the Office of the Secretary of the Treasury Board".

Mr. Speaker, to me that looks like a step backward. It looks like the Minister and the Department for which he is responsible have issued definite guidelines to personnel officers, allowing them to deviate from, to water down language requirements, and that worries me. I asked the question because, Mr. Speaker, we all know that when a senior manager, a superintendent or a senior person in charge of a department who is responsible for a number of subordinates does not have the requisite language qualifications, that person cannot converse correctly with the employees in the official language of their choice, their language of work. I will get back to that later, because that is another very important issue and may cause problems in communications between employees and management.

The question today is: Why this retrograde measure? Why these weak guidelines that fail to demand that administrators meet the position's requirements and thus be able to converse with their employees?

Mr. Speaker, this week I found further evidence of this reluctance when reading certain comments by the Public Service Commission on the language of work, and I would like to share with the House what I would call a serious anomaly. In 1985, the Chairman of the Public Service Commission appeared before the Standing Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons. In his brief to the committee, the Chairman at the time Mr. Edgar Gallant submitted, and I am reading from the brief, "the three fundamental objectives of Government policy in the area of official languages in the Public Service: bilingual service to the public, equality of status of both official languages as languages of work—I repeat: "equality of status of both official languages as languages of work"—and finally, "equitable participation by both language groups in the Public Service". I certainly have no quarrel with that!

This year, Mr. Speaker, the present Chairman appeared before the committee, and we read practically the same text, word for word. I quote: "three fundamental objectives of Government policy in the area of official languages in the Public Service: bilingual service to the public, equitable participation by both language groups—those two are the same—the last one, Mr. Speaker, has changed: "respect for both official languages in the job environment". We are no longer talking about equality of status of both official languages as languages of work but about respect for both official languages in the job environment. That is a euphemism, it is ambiguous and it may be a smoke screen. Maybe managers are going to respect the language of their employees, but they will say: Your language does not happen to be mine, and you will just have to speak my language. And there is going to be more trouble, because we have just seen that Treasury Board

has reduced language requirements for senior managers. And as I pointed out, the Public Service Commission has changed the Government's guidelines and objectives. It is no longer "equality of status as the language of work" but "respect for both official languages in the job environment". As a mandate and as an objective, Mr. Speaker, it is much weaker.

And I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary to explain why this Government, after promising amendments to the Official Languages Act, after making a formal commitment in two Throne Speeches, and after giving me in this House the assurance that there would be no reluctance to implement the Act, why is this Government issuing directives to senior officials reducing language requirements, and why is this Government, through the Public Service Commission, significantly lowering the commitment that a Canadian citizen working in the Public Service is entitled to use his or her own language at work. This is not only a matter of respect, it is a matter of work equality, it is the right for the individual to use, and it is not I who says that, it is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it is the individual's working language that is the decisive factor and that language should prevail.

I am concerned Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Government, I am asking the Parliamentary Secretary to answer, to state clearly that I am mistaken, that the Government has no intention of reducing language requirements, that such a directive from Treasury Board is an error, that they are going to withdraw it, and that on the other hand, they will specifically revert to these goals, serving the public in the customer's language, Canadians working in their own language, and fair representation. This means that all Canadians, whether from the east, the west, the centre, the north or the south would have the right to work for the Canadian Government and in a way that is fair.

Mr. Michel Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, as requested by my hon. friend from Ottawa—Vanier, I am going to tell him that he is wrong, that our Government is more concerned than ever with the language of work of Public Service employees. Some progress is being made, Mr. Speaker. I am aware that my hon. friend from Ottawa—Vanier has worked very hard for this. But may I remind him that when I was elected in September, 1984—I am willing to share my personal experiences with him just as he shares his with me—in spite of the previous Government's good intentions and efforts to implement a bilingual policy such as the one we know today, I very quickly realized that, being a Quebecer representing a nearly 100 per cent Francophone area, that the officials he is referring to and about whom he is concerned most of the time had difficulty speaking both languages.

Mr. Speaker, as the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) is well aware, nobody is against motherhood. He was referring a while ago to equality. It is true that we are all equal, but there are haves and have-nots. Mr. Speaker, we are 27 million Canadians building a country and of course there are more Anglophones than Francophones. We are