

House of Commons

Nations since that body was established, according to the information I have, as well as in this chamber in the autumn of 1957 when the international postal congress met here. With regard to the latter experience I am going to say nothing. That matter was dealt with at length during the course of the debate to which I have referred and which took place in this house respecting the setting up of the committee. It was dealt with at length by the then postmaster general, who pointed out the benefits of the plan and also some of the inherent difficulties that were experienced by that conference.

As far back as May 22, 1956, the junior chamber of commerce in a brief delivered to the then speaker of the House of Commons, advocated such a system as well. I have before me an extract from the department of public information of the United Nations in which there is a general summary of the technique applied in that chamber. It says:

The official languages of the general assembly—and of the United Nations—are Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish; the working languages are English, French and Spanish.

A system of simultaneous interpretation is used in the general assembly auditorium, council chambers and most of the committee rooms. Listeners are provided with earphones which they may tune in to any one of the five official languages.

However, it says this also:

An interpreter does not translate literally; he renders into another language the ideas and arguments of the speaker, in the speaker's order.

At meetings where the traditional consecutive method of interpretation is used, the speaker's remarks are translated after he has completed his speech.

Even there, as was pointed out during the debate last fall, it has been found difficult to secure the necessary technological skill in translating ability which will permit of simultaneous translation taking place. Because of that fact and in order to assure that if this motion is passed those who will be appointed to discharge the duties and responsibilities in connection with translation may be qualified and trained accordingly, action to this end has been taken. Such action, however, is on a provisional basis pending the outcome of the motion before the house.

Mr. Speaker, as one who through the years has tried to develop some facility in speaking the French language, though without what might be called mediocre success, I have come to a point where I can, speaking generally, follow debates in French provided there are not too many interruptions and dependent also upon the velocity with which the speaker delivers his speech. I can fully understand the position of French speaking members who, I think I can say with entire truthfulness, have on many occasions expressed their

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

feelings on this subject in the course of speeches in this house. They have explained their difficulties in fully expressing themselves in the English language, which course has been made necessary by the large percentage of English speaking members.

There is general agreement that this assembly, now considering this motion, is under our constitution entirely bilingual in character.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: There is, therefore, no reason why the presenting of this motion should have been so long delayed; and the adoption of this motion will be belated recognition of the equality of the two basic languages of this country as related to discussions in this chamber. The motion cannot but benefit all members, in that its adoption will assure that no matter what their language might be, all members may from now on speak with assurance in either English or French, knowing that regardless of the knowledge of the language in question on the part of other members, their views can be completely presented and understood in this house.

I also believe this motion will provide belated recognition of the fact that under our constitution this basic right has been secured and will be maintained as part of our constitutional freedom, and will be regarded as unchangeable and unchanging. This view, I believe, is of the essence in the maintenance of unity within our country. After all, our very confederation came about as a consequence of the partnership between those of French and English origin. Because of that fact everything we can do to ensure the preservation of those basic constitutional rights and the equality of those rights of language should be attained and implemented.

Having said that, I am not going into a general discussion of the benefits that will accrue. I have referred to them in a general way. I believe there has been a very widespread wish and desire on the part of hon. members in this chamber and on the part of members of preceding parliaments for the establishment of this system. For that reason it was considered by the government, following representations that were made from the very first days when we took over the administration of this country, that at this, the very earliest opportunity, action should be taken in this regard.

Therefore on behalf of the government, and I hope with the support of hon. members in all parts of the house, I am placing this measure before the house to the end that by its achievement we will be actually symbolizing