

*Bilingual Districts*

next day. Like my friend, the hon. member for Edmonton West, I have had only a short while since I first saw the document, and I have been trying to peruse it while other things have been going on because it is, indeed, a very important matter.

It deals, of course, with an issue concerning which there is a good deal of emotion in this country. Almost anything that one says results in those who disagree with him wanting to put him in a certain category. My party, along with the other parties in the House, supported the Official Languages Act. We take the view that there are two official languages in this country, and there is no backing away from that fact. I do not want any word of caution that I say or that my friend, the hon. member for Edmonton West, has said to suggest in any way that we withdraw at all from the recognition of the two languages in this country. That is a fact, and we recognize it.

I believe the hon. member for Edmonton West has raised points that should be considered, and I hope that in the 90-day period which must elapse before the government issues any proclamations, further study will be given. I point out, as did my hon. friend who preceded me, that there were ten members on the commission. Only eight of them signed the report, and even two of those eight issued minority statements. The other two issued minority reports. Even on the votes on the various issues which were resolved there was considerable variation, so that all told it was not only a difficult assignment given to the board but the board had great difficulty in reaching its conclusions.

● (1230)

I think the board has done a particularly worth-while service by putting in at the very beginning of its report, on pages 3 and 4, a few sentences which seek to make it clear what bilingual districts are all about. On page 3, paragraph 3, I read as follows:

Section 2 of the act declares that "The English and French languages are the official languages of Canada for all purposes of the Parliament and Government of Canada, and possess and enjoy equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all the institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada."

Also on page 3, paragraph 6, I read the following:

When a bilingual district is proclaimed, the federal government is required to communicate with the public and to provide its services in both official languages at each of its principal offices in every department, agency, and judicial, quasi-judicial or administrative body or Crown corporation in that bilingual district.

Now I draw special attention to paragraphs 7 and 8, which read as follows:

7. Although the purpose of bilingual districts thus appears to be simple and clear, we have encountered so much confusion in the public's mind on this point that we would like to emphasize the basic intention by reiterating it. The objective of creating a bilingual district is to require the federal government to provide its services in both languages.

8. However, it should be clearly understood that the existence of a bilingual district will not oblige the public to become bilingual. Far from it. In fact, just the opposite is true. A bilingual district can protect unilingualism by ensuring that an individual who speaks only English or only French can communicate with the federal government in his or her own language. The bilingual requirement that is imposed by a district does not fall upon the public but upon the government.

I should like to emphasize where the responsibility lies, on the government, not on the public. I should also like to

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emphasize that every effort should be made to clear up the confusion which surrounds this matter.

Paragraphs 9 and 10, on page 4, are also very important and read as follows:

9. It should be added that the obligation incurred by the federal government does not mean that all of its civil servants must be, or must become, bilingual. Only those employees dealing with the public under the circumstances described above would be expected to be bilingual.

Paragraph 10 means something to us in western Canada. It reads as follows:

10. It is also worth observing that nothing in the Official Languages Act, whether it be the clauses in the statute establishing English and French as the official languages of Canada or any other section providing for the implementation of this declaration, derogates in any way from the privileges enjoyed by any official language. Section 38 of the act expressly forbids the diminution of any legal or customary rights or privileges possessed or acquired by any additional language before or after the act came into force.

I believe it is because of misunderstanding around the principles of bilingual districts that much of the opposition has arisen, and I contend that in the 90-day period it now has, the government should think seriously about the whole matter and should note the very effective criticisms, so far as I could judge from a quick reading of them, made by Mrs. Duckworth in her minority report and also by Mr. Justice Monnin in his minority report. There is one point in Mr. Justice Monnin's report concerning Montreal, which the government has accepted, but I suggest that the whole subject is such a complicated and complex one that further thought should be given to it.

Speaking for myself and speaking officially for my party, I wish to say that this is not said on the part of persons who want to downgrade bilingualism or to get away from the facts of life in Canada. We say that because we have a country in which we must recognize two official languages, we must make all aspects of bilingualism work, and it will work better if a great deal of thought is given to all these matters. I hope there will be more thought and, indeed, thought in light of the public discussion which will take place in the 90-day cooling off period, shall I call it, which is required under the act.

I said that I noted Mr. Justice Monnin's comment, or one of his comments, in his minority report having to do with Montreal, and I am glad the government seems to have accepted his recommendation rather than the recommendation of the majority of the board. The recommendation of the majority was that no bilingual district was necessary in Montreal; that the English-speaking minority was protected by tradition, and so on. Mr. Justice Monnin did not agree. I gather the government has not agreed either, but has concluded that just as French-speaking persons in Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, should be able to deal with government offices there in French and have that right protected by law, then so should English-speaking persons in Montreal have that right in their city.

I notice, also, a recommendation which the government has rejected—this is in the majority report—which calls for a new body to study the whole language situation in Canada. If I understand that correctly, it seems to go beyond the two languages. It seems to include the reference I made a moment ago, and I believe the government has made too quick a rejection of that proposal, saying that