

area of jurisdiction in a way that would assure a fair balance between our two groups.

The purpose of the bill which I have the honour to introduce today, together with the hon. member for Maisonneuve-Rosemont (Mr. Joyal), is precisely to determine a series of measures which would translate into reality the abstract principle set forth in section 2 of the Official Languages Act to the effect that French and English should have equal status in all institutions of the Government of Canada. This principle having been unanimously adopted by all parties represented in the House eight years ago, I feel the time has finally come for us to take concrete steps to give life to this principle, failing which it will exist only in principle and as a theoretical abstraction. Bill C-202, to amend the Official Languages Act, contains therefore about ten concrete proposals which we should like the House to adopt. The purpose of the first one is this: the federal government should recognize its responsibility to maintain the demographic equilibrium of this country, or as we say in clause 1.1(1)(c), and I quote:

to support the attainment of such demographic goals in respect of the size, rate of growth, structure and geographic distribution of the Canadian population, as tend to support and promote the principle of equality between the two official languages and linguistic groups,

For too long, Mr. Speaker, our immigration policy has disregarded this aspect.

We all know that when Canada was founded there was a blissful balance between the two linguistic communities and that, particularly because of a declining birth rate since the early fifties, the proportion of the French-speaking population in Canada has been going down. It is obvious that this trend has a considerable impact, not only on the political scene of all provinces and particularly of the province of Quebec, but also on the issue of national unity.

Our second proposal is that there should be an equitable balance between both language groups as regards their participation in the institutions, programs and initiatives of the Parliament and Government of Canada.

I could obviously give a lot of examples of this. My only comment will be that the Department of the Environment is spending only 4 per cent of its expenditures in the province of Quebec. As for the National Research Council, out of an approximate number of 560 scientists in Canada, barely 27, if my figures are correct, have French as their first language. I think that, nine years after the Official Languages Act was passed, it is time to recognize the principle that there be a French approach, aspect and dimension in our various programs.

Third, we would like the French language to become an autonomous drafting language. What happens, Mr. Speaker, is that statutes are drafted in English then, of course, translated into French. All those in this House who are lawyers know that the French versions reflect neither the spirit of the language nor French law, and in future, under the principle

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that the law reflects the ways and customs of a people, legislation should always be drafted and passed in both official languages at the same time.

Fourth, as we say in clause 8(2), we would like both French and English to be the languages of work of the institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada, and that the departments have the duty to ensure the observance of an equitable balance in the number of positions reserved by them for Anglophones and for Francophones.

You probably remember that in 1969 we tried to limit the scope of the legislation to the relations between the public and the institutions of the federal government. But it is time that this other dimension, the dimension of the working language within federal institutions, reflected the principle of equality that we have entrenched in the Official Languages Act.

Fifth, we would like that the collective agreements entered into by the government with various public service employees' unions and various agencies not run counter to the law. At present, Mr. Speaker, it is impossible to speed up the recruitment of Francophones at the intermediate management level, precisely because of the collective agreements. And I also remind you that a few years ago, parliament was asked to ratify by a resolution an agreement already reached with this private group. I do not think that parliament should follow the lead of any private group, but on the contrary, it should serve the best interests of our country.

In clause 11(1), we suggest that this act, unless otherwise specified, be paramount to any other act.

● (1612)

I must confess that as a French speaker and a member of parliament I felt deeply insulted as I attended the hearings of the highest court in Quebec, the Court of Appeals, and heard the counsel for Air Canada argue that the Official Languages Act was only a pretence of an act, which could be dismissed as unenforceable wishful thinking, which had been adopted with the full knowledge it was unenforceable legislation. In my opinion, that was an insult not only to French-speaking Canadians but especially to the authority of this parliament.

On the other hand, it is a sad comment that the annual reports by the Commissioner of Official Languages have been pigeonholed in the various departments where they are gathering dust. In his last report Mr. Keith Spicer who was then about to resign his post, drew up a list of the various departments where disregard of this law had been worsening year after year since he wrote his first report. So we propose an extension to section 33 to the effect that government departments which, without legitimate excuse fail to comply with a ruling by the Commissioner be deemed to have committed an offence punishable not only with a fine but also imprisonment, just as would be the case for non-compliance with other federal laws.