

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

[English]

BILINGUAL REQUIREMENTS FOR COMMISSIONAIRES AT MUSEUMS

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): I have raised this question on two successive days, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, I asked the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) whether he would review the dismissal of the 15 commissioners from the national museums located in Ottawa. You will recall that these men were dismissed because they were unilingual. The only assurance which has been given us on this question is that new jobs will be found for them elsewhere.

I now discover that the government has no right to do this, because it is the responsibility of the Corps of Commissioners to place these men in jobs. I have also found that some of these men have not been placed in new positions. Some have been demoted. I think this information is generally known to hon. members and to the public.

The most disconcerting aspect of this question is that it is hard to find anyone who will accept the blame. Everyone seems to be ashamed of what has been done. Actually, it should be the responsibility of the board of trustees which, since last April, has been in charge of museum affairs. The Chairman, Mr. Jean Ostiguy, recalls no such decision having been made by the board. There was no consultation with the Department of Veterans' Affairs with respect to the veterans' charter and veterans' preference as applicable to employment with the government of Canada. The minister has denied responsibility. The Secretary General of the National Museums, Mr. Charles MacKenzie, said he gave a directive to Mr. Wait who is in charge of the commissioners in the Ottawa area. Now, there is a further development. Mr. MacKenzie said he received his instructions from the Clerk of the Privy Council, Mr. Gordon Robertson, in a communique last October which urged departmental heads to implement the terms of the official languages bill as soon as possible. Today, in the house, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) admits that he authorized the directive that was sent out by the Clerk of the Privy Council.

• (10:10 p.m.)

I raise the issue at this time because what has been done is patently unjust. When deputy ministers employed in the government of Canada are found linguistically deficient, they are sent on an expensive course at the taxpayers' expense. Some of these courses cost as

[Mr. Gendron.]

much as \$150,000. But when commissioners are found linguistically deficient, they are removed from their positions.

All of these commissioners are men with outstanding military service to their country. Clause 9 of the Official Languages Act bill merely states, to summarize it, that it is the duty of departments to provide services to the public in both languages in certain locations. I also further discovered that commissioners are specifically forbidden to engage in conversation with the public except in emergencies; their duties are security and custodial only.

I think I can best present the core of this problem tonight by quoting part of a speech made by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) to the Kiwanis Club in Ottawa recently. At that time he expressed the two sides of the problem of promoting bilingualism in the public service in Ottawa. He said that the program is designed to correct the injustices of the past, while avoiding the creation of new injustices.

I believe that an injustice has been done in this case. Further, I urge the government to review the whole matter and to see that these employees who have been dealt with unjustly are restored to their positions. As I say, today the Prime Minister further admitted to being the author of the directive that caused the whole unhappy process, and which incidentally was an infringement on all the rights of members of parliament because the Official Languages Act has not been dealt with by this house. It is not good enough to lay the blame on civil servants. I believe that the responsibility lies with the government, and the remedy is in their hands.

Mr. E. F. Whelan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) is to be congratulated on his interest in this subject. Many of us are aware of his constant watchdog approach to this topic. I have listened to his question. The minister answered him yesterday, and I can assure all hon. members that the question of bilingualism in our national museums is of utmost concern to the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier). He has never neglected or ignored this question.

I think that the Secretary of State has shown deep concern about the accusations that have been made. He has asked about reports that some commissioners have lost benefits or even salary. In view of the statement of the Prime Minister today, I am sure