

Civil Service Act

I know, Mr. Speaker, that a real and commendable movement is under way and gaining momentum among our English-speaking fellow citizens in favour of exchanges between the two racial groups; this necessary effort is more commendable than that of the government, since it is not made compulsory by the constitution.

In the name of national unity, which they must bring about by deeds and not by words, the government is bound to approve this bill and thus show their good faith. They have no reason to reject it since, by this bill, the preference already given to veterans is widened and the inalienable rights of five million Canadian citizens are confirmed. So far, it must be confessed, we have been treated as a conquered race, but if one goes back to the establishment of our government it must be admitted that two-way bilingualism has become the indispensable confirmation of an honourable compromise between two great ethnical forces which, until then, had been facing each other.

Hon. Roch Pinard (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with a great deal of interest to the remarks made first in English and then in French by the hon. member for Lapointe (Mr. Girard) in connection with the bill he has introduced in the house today.

In the course of his remarks, he referred to an answer given to him by my colleague, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and by myself this year about the number of bilingual employees in the civil service. While dealing with this subject, he charged me and my colleague and, in fact, the government we are representing in these matters, with failure to give an adequate reply to his question. In his view, we failed to give an adequate answer because we had found it impossible to supply the figures requested in his question. Yet, in the answer we did give, we pointed out why it had proved impossible for the civil service commission, to whom I had referred the question, to give a complete answer to the question. It is because the civil service commission, this being a matter of degree and requiring a detailed analysis, is unable to tell whether an employee does or does not speak both languages. I felt that the hon. member would not be satisfied with information dealing merely with civil service positions requiring a knowledge of both languages. I am confident he will agree that very many people in this country speak both languages. He will also admit that there are a great many civil servants who, while they speak rather

[Mr. Girard.]

fluently both languages, did not have to qualify as bilingual when they entered the civil service. Therefore, an answer dealing only with those employees who had to qualify as bilingual would have been inadequate.

He then pointed out that the French-speaking ministers in particular did not avail themselves often enough of the opportunities they may have to speak French in this house. Yet he himself behaved no differently, finding it convenient and useful, if not indispensable, to speak English at the beginning of his remarks. He thus answered his own question.

In fact, I do believe that, in spite of the good will shown by the hon. members generally, there are many whose knowledge of a second language is not sufficient to allow them to understand the remarks made by members of the government; when, for instance, an English-speaking member who does not speak French and understands it but imperfectly puts a question to a member of the cabinet, I do not believe it is logical to answer him in a language which is not his own, which is not his mother tongue.

Mr. Speaker, I think I should add—and I feel sure I am expressing a wish which is shared by the hon. member—that, as long as the majority in this house do not speak both languages and understand them adequately, it will be quite difficult—the hon. member will agree with me if he is sincere, and I believe he is—it will be extremely difficult to suggest to the members of the government that they should answer in French in such circumstances.

(Text):

Mr. Speaker, both as the minister responsible to parliament for the civil service commission and as a French-speaking Canadian representing a constituency mostly composed of Canadians of French extraction, I feel it is my duty to express this government's opinion as well as my own views on this proposed legislation which would have the effect, if enacted, of bringing about a very substantial change in our Civil Service Act.

I wish, first of all, to commend the hon. member for Lapointe (Mr. Girard) for his remarks. After hearing them I feel that he has done his job in all sincerity and that his intentions are to see to it that the principle of bilingualism, which I share with him, be applied as generally as possible in the federal