

*Official Languages Act*

[English]

**Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** Mr. Speaker, at the outset I would like to thank the minister for his courtesy in supplying a copy of the statement well in advance. I think all members of this House want to make certain that Canadians can secure the services of their government in both languages and that our public service will not only be the best possible but, more than that, it will be a contented public service while this process is going on. Even Liberals, however, are human—

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**An hon. Member:** Explain.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):**—and there are few greater examples of mismanagement than with respect to this program and its implementation which is so important to the future unity of our country. Perhaps I should not be unduly unfair in singling out the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Chrétien)—as many of his colleagues are equally guilty of mismanagement, as we saw a few days ago at the beginning of the debate in which we are involved.

Let me tell the House why we on this side believe there has been gross mismanagement. I will use only the data contained in the minister's statement to support my claim; then I will tell hon. members how the program could have been implemented in a much more efficient, economic and humane manner. Let us consider the minister's report. It shows, first, that the government has misled the Canadian public, this House and the public service. The report shows that the number of positions identified as bilingual has more than doubled in two years, from 25,000 to approximately 53,600. Notice the word "approximately", for the figure may go substantially higher. There is little evidence here of any sensible planning before the government made its decision.

This increase, apart from being an example of the government's shoddy preparation for the bilingual program, has deeper implications. It shows that Canadians who are unilingual, either Francophone or Anglophone, will find it more and more difficult to reach the higher ranks of the federal public service; and since, as the government admits, no one knows why some of us cannot learn languages, the government is unnecessarily halting the careers of a large number of young Canadians. When one considers the lack of leadership by the federal government in the provision of language training in schools across the country, and the relative failure of the government's own language training program, one can appreciate the hardship caused to young Canadians.

Nineteen per cent of all positions are now designated bilingual. In the national capital region the figure reaches 66.4 per cent. This means that promotion in our national capital region is highly restricted. Yet even outside Ottawa the chances of promotion are not much better. A glance at appendix B to the report provided by the minister shows that 92.7 per cent of all executive positions, 36.6 per cent of administrative positions, 26.8 per cent of all scientific and professional positions, and 25 per cent of all administrative support positions are designated as bilin-

[Mr. Chrétien.]

gual in which fluent use of both French and English is essential.

These figures make a mockery of the various so-called protections provided in the government's proposals for the implementation of bilingualism in the federal public service of this country. The minister, in his report, demonstrates the generosity of the government, if I may use that word. Unilingual employees aged 60 or over will be exempt from language training while retaining the right to occupy or to be appointed to bilingual positions. Since at the same time the government is endeavouring to force many civil servants into retirement at the age of 60, one can see exactly how much protection is afforded by such vacuous statements as the one just referred to. The government admits, as we all must, that there is a serious problem in connection with language training. This is a problem which seems to bother most English-speaking countries and countries such as ours where a high proportion of the population speaks English. Most educators could have told the government the grave problems facing it in the area of language education. The evidence was all around the government but was obviously ignored and the government decided to go ahead without consultation.

We need to do a number of things. Most of all, we need to improve the motivation of members of the public service of this country to join wholeheartedly and willingly in the bilingualism program. If we are to accomplish this we must do certain things. First, we must reform our language training programs so that far fewer public servants will need to take full-time, centralized training programs. This can be done by having continuing inter-departmental programs which will assist members of the department concerned to understand and read the other official language. Only those with particular motivation and aptitudes should be required to take full language training in order to qualify, which would involve competence in speaking and writing as well. Competence in reading and comprehension are sufficient for many of the tasks necessary in positions which have currently been designated as bilingual in the full sense. An increase in the number of public servants who can read in the other official language will mean that an increasing number of unilingual personnel, either Francophone or Anglophone, can be employed in better positions than at present.

I suggest we also need to adopt a new approach to the operational side of the public service based upon a decentralized, bilingual infrastructure. We need a rapid translation capability so that an increasing number of Canadians can work in their own language within their departments. A little outside advice would have helped the government improve the implementation of these programs. That advice was offered but the government refused to accept it.

In closing, let me say that we are just beginning the debate on the budget; therefore I am particularly disappointed that the minister's statement did not contain any figures concerning the cost of the program. Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind hon. members that during the twenty-ninth parliament we asked the government to put into the law of the land the protection of the guidelines that we dealt with in that debate. This they have appar-