

Bilingual Districts

from this time on. What consultation is contemplated with the provinces with respect to the report of the advisory board? The implications in two instances are quite wide. As well, what consultation procedures are contemplated with regard to the professional associations within the public service?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member will be aware that the board did have very extensive consultations, in his province of Nova Scotia, with the provincial government and with municipal authorities in some of the larger areas, as well as with local associations. We generally found ourselves in agreement with the conclusions the commissioners reached in relation to the province of Nova Scotia. I think that is clear from the statement I made this morning. However, the comments of the provincial governments on the report itself, of which they are now in possession and this will be the first time they have seen the conclusions, have been sought in a letter from the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) which is already in their hands, and we have asked for a response with the utmost expediency.

Mr. Forrestall: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the further consultative procedure. It is necessary not only with respect to Nova Scotia but all the provinces. In New Brunswick there will be a significant change from the old system. Will the professional associations of the public service, such as PIPS, the Public Service Alliance, and so on, be given an opportunity to express further views on the conclusions which I presume they, too, are now seeing for the first time?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is probably aware of the existence and functions of a very useful body known as the National Joint Council, wherein discussions of this kind of thing and a number of other matters are undertaken as a matter of routine, continuing procedure. It would be my expectation that Treasury Board would ensure that the comments of the National Joint Council would be obtained.

Mr. Blaker: Mr. Speaker, can the minister assist me by confirming my understanding of some details with respect to the statement which he read this morning? Is it the intention of the government literally to overrule the report of the bilingual districts board and thereby assure the Montreal island population, or perhaps the Montreal urban area population that it will be served in both official languages? The essence of my question is whether that service will be given, not only as a matter of fact but, indeed, as a matter of government regulation and/or law.

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, I would like to confirm that the standards of availability of federal government services in both official languages which are applicable to the provinces of Canada other than Quebec are equally available by formal steps to the residents of the province of Quebec. The federal government services in that province will be under the same obligation as they are in any other province to deliver their services, where there is sufficient demand, in the language of the citizen's choice.

Mr. Blaker: I thank the minister. I now take the next logical step be referring to the minister's statement. I quote:

[*Translation*]

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, there will be one or more bilingual districts in Greater Montreal.

[*English*]

The question which arises immediately as a result of the concept of one or more bilingual districts within the island of Montreal or the Montreal geographical area is the problem of the mobility of the population. If, for example, the government chose to begin drawing lines on the map of Montreal, it would not take into consideration, or might not make the distinction between the characteristic of residence and the characteristic of place of work.

• (1410)

I wonder whether the minister would be so kind as to explain to the House what he means by the statement that there might be one or more bilingual districts on the island of Montreal or in the Montreal area. I suggest that the distribution of population is such that the whole area should be considered as one bilingual district.

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, it is precisely because of the argument made by the hon. gentleman that perhaps it ought to be one district. This provides certain advantages, but equally it provides some disadvantages in terms of availability of services. For instance, the act requires that the principal offices of government departments or agencies in each bilingual district must have this bilingual capacity. If there is only one district, it means only one principal office. Obviously, the greater the number of districts, the greater the requirement by law for bilingual capacity. A balance has to be struck between the considerations expressed by the hon. gentleman and affording the maximum practical service to the public.

Mr. Blaker: A final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the minister, but may I put the question in reverse form? Is it foreseeable that there is some geographical location on or around the island of Montreal that would not provide bilingual service to its citizens?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is asking me to provide the answers to a study that we have said we are going to undertake immediately. If I knew all the answers, I would suggest that we did not need a study. It would be presumptuous to endeavour to anticipate the results that a serious and profound study of this question will yield.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, may I refer the minister to paragraph 10 of the report as it appears on page 4. I will read it for purposes of clarification:

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 additional 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.