

Official Languages

the fact that in terms of law the opinion of this parliament is as incidental as a cough in the night. There is no doubt about that. There is no guarantee in this resolution without the amendment, no protection over a period of time, and it has no more force than the statement of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) in December or the pledge of the late prime minister years before.

The minister asks for flexibility. If that is a serious request, it raises important questions indeed about what other matters the government might excuse from legislation with the argument that flexibility is needed. What matter before this parliament is so fixed and firm that it does not require flexibility? That, Sir, is what the process of amendment is all about. The extra advantage of the amendment is the requirement that any changes, any flexibility, must be accomplished in the light of day, with the knowledge and deliberate consent of the parliament and people involved. And until that consent is achieved, the people concerned have guarantees. I ask you, Sir, what is so special about this matter that the normal practices cannot apply?

The minister suggested that this matter is very difficult to be definite about, involving as it does staff relations and subjective judgments. He went on to suggest—he didn't come right out and say it, but the implication was clear—that the application of language guidelines is so complex that only the people who actually apply them know enough to criticize. There is an argument with possibilities. If we accept that view, then this parliament would be mute. There would be no criticism or scrutiny of anything, and no control.

The government will have to find a better defence than to suggest that matters are so complex that only it can deal with them. Of course they are complex, but either you are going to have guidelines or you are not, and if we have a situation where an administration or an administrator is able to modify a guideline because it is too difficult to enforce, then again we have no guarantees at all.

The minister pointed out that spokesmen for this party had argued, when the Languages Act was first before parliament, for an approach by resolution because that would allow flexibility. That, Sir, is a mere debating point, and matters relating to official bilingualism are too important to be dealt with by debating points. In any event, the government rejected then the approach it proposes now, and the practice was established of proceeding by law, not by resolution, on this question. If the substance of the matter is important enough to be enshrined in law, so are the principles which guide the application of bilingualism in the public service. The government just cannot have it both ways.

But if the minister is serious, and if we grant his request for flexibility, we will again create conditions in which public servants or prospective public servants will fear that regulations will be interpreted against their interests. That is the very fear this resolution purports to redress, yet if we reject this amendment we run the risk of reviving the fear instead of reducing it. In light of all that I have said I assume the minister was not serious in his suggestion on Friday. He was not stating the government's response so much as he was testing the wind. Certainly, if he is interested in allaying fears, achieving bilingualism

and getting on with the business of Canada, he and his colleagues will support the amendment and give force to what they propose.

As the House knows, this matter of bilingualism is not without contention. In my own region of western Canada there are some who, as a matter of what they see as principle, would oppose virtually any measure designed to make bilingualism work. In my view they are the voices of a small minority, and are no more representative of that region than the voices of separatism are representative of Quebec.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): Indeed, Sir, they are probably less so. But I say with seriousness that there are other western Canadians, many in number, who have reservations about the application of official bilingualism but who will go along with it as part of the price they pay for the other benefits of their country. With time and with encouragement, many of the sons and daughters of this group will become bilingual, and some of the group themselves will, because that will be part of being Canadian, like learning to pronounce Mahavolich, or learning to live with snow. But if instead of being encouraged to accept bilingualism these people are encouraged to suspect it, there is the danger that they will become stubborn; that is the danger directly aroused by this debate. The problem is not the nine principles. It is not even the DeBané addendum or amendment. The problem is the public tone and the suggested motives for the introduction of the resolution.

When I began my remarks on Friday, I referred to my own regret at the innuendo in the remarks in January of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand). That, Sir, was an insult to me and to many other members who deliberately faced down the temptation to embrace prejudice on this question. But more than an insult, these insinuations set poison in the system. A predictable response has come from that small minority which actively opposes bilingualism. But the poison could spread to other and more tolerant parts of the body politic, particularly if the innuendos continue and if the government rejects an amendment which merely gives the binding force of law to what it proposes.

I do not give this warning lightly. As I listened to the Minister of Communications (Mr. Pelletier) on Friday with his talk of dinosaurs and his playing with the monarchy, I wondered what effort he has made to understand my part of the country. I have tried to understand his, and so have several of my colleagues here as well as my neighbours at home.

[*Translation*]

It was not easy for us who came from cities and towns where there were no French Canadians, from areas far from Quebec, and who attended schools where French is not properly taught. That problem still exists.

[*English*]

But we are doing the positive things we can. Sir, we have a right to expect not patience but reciprocity, at least from a minister of the Crown, some fairness, and some