

Official Languages Act

suddenly the opposition, which did not exist at second reading, has come forward in the way of amendments.

Let us consider the amendments proposed by the Member for Winnipeg—Assiniboine. First, there is his suggestion that the policy should be applied to institutions wherever it is reasonable to do so in the circumstances. The question of what is reasonable could, itself, be a most disputatious matter. What is reasonable to the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Assiniboine would not strike many other people as being reasonable, even a majority of the country, in the way of working with a policy of official bilingualism.

● (1710)

Concern has been expressed about employment and advancement in the Public Service of Canada, as if it were some type of right. Little concern is expressed for the policy itself by those who are critical of the Bill or those who want to weaken or destroy it entirely. Little is said of the brute reality of the country that there are large minorities who do not know the other official language and who deserve service from the Government of Canada in that language. They also deserve the opportunity of employment in the Public Service of Canada.

I see from press reports that the Hon. Member for Athabasca (Mr. Shields), the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, in his Party caucus apparently alluded to the French-speaking minority in Quebec, and the minority on a national basis, persons who speak only French, who surely deserve service in that language and the opportunity to work in it.

I find the suggestion quite incredible, that persons in the Public Service of Canada should not have to make the effort to learn French. Here I am speaking primarily of English-speaking members of the Public Service, and the fact that they should not have the obligation to learn French and be prepared to work in French in various carefully designed and established situations, but the ordinary citizen of Canada, down to children, should be required to become bilingual because others will not use the opportunity and take training provided by the Government of Canada in order to become bilingual. That is the fundamental unfairness of opposition to official bilingualism of the type expressed by the Hon. Member for Simcoe South.

[Translation]

Mr. Charles Hamelin (Charlevoix): Madam Speaker, I am well aware of the solemnity and seriousness of the occasion as I rise today to deal with the amendments and the very principle of the Bill C-72, which in a few hours will become the new Canadian official languages legislation.

I suggest that this new legislation is one of the corner-stones of the new and richer Canada which we want to build, a Canada more receptive to its two linguistic communities.

[English]

This piece of legislation is an Act of nation-building. Building Canada is more than a world, more than an attitude. It is at first a behaviour of generosity and openness.

[Translation]

I suggest that to build this country will require more than words, more than wishes; it will require openness and generosity towards our two linguistic communities and our minorities generally. Such is the purpose of this bill which is vital for our national unity, that all together we may continue to believe in this great Canadian vision which we must constantly reiterate and enhance. Our two well balanced communities will have to continue respecting each other.

I can understand the concerns of my colleagues who are trying to protect and defend the interests of unilingual Canadians. I understand them perfectly and I respect them for that; moreover I acknowledge their right to rise in the House to express their views. On the other hand, I cannot accept the fact that anyone should try to limit the rights of their neighbours, because by doing so, they are limiting and restricting their own rights, as though they were cutting the tree branch on which they are sitting.

And I am proud of the part I took during four years in the development of this new legislation. Despite all the admiration I have for my colleague, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) who, for fifteen years has been the true advocate of linguistic minorities in our country, I am sad to see him now play petty politics. I know because he has proved during fifteen years that he is capable of doing much better than that. He himself had been waiting for his own party to act; he had hoped new legislation would be brought forward which would respect minorities better and, as it is said in clause 2 of the Bill, really ensure respect and equality for the two linguistic communities, attempt to recognize and advance the development of our linguistic minorities and define the powers and obligations of federal institutions.

You know, a man called Jean-Claude, who was not from Montreal—Sainte-Marie, his full name is Jean-Claude Saint-Martin, said: I choose to do good because doing good is a quiet activity, and noise never did anyone any good. I feel my colleague, the Hon. Member for Montreal—Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) and some others are making statements that foster division more than unity. And what we need . . .

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) on a point of order.

Mr. Caccia: I apologize for the interruption, Madam Speaker. It seems to me that there is a rule of relevance in the House, and the Hon. Member should speak to the amendment that we are presently debating and not on any other matter that may have happened in committee. I bring to your attention, Madam Speaker, that in my view the Hon. Member is out of order.