

Oral Questions

House and the public at large that officers in my department are on the watch and will take necessary measures in the future.

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[English]

METRIC CONVERSION

REQUEST FOR PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE BEFORE SYSTEM PUT INTO FULL EFFECT

Mr. Bill Domm (Peterborough): Madam Speaker, I would have preferred to ask my question of the Prime Minister, but in his absence I shall direct it to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. My question stems from a recent government announcement to proceed in some 20 cities in Canada with the implementation of metric, affecting approximately six million people.

In light of the adverse reaction and effects to small businesses and consumers, will the minister responsible for industry, trade and commerce assure this House—and answer the question—that he will allow full parliamentary discussion on the subject of the implementation of the metric system before it is forced on business communities across Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Charles Lapointe (Minister of State, Small Businesses): Madam Speaker, first I should like to remind the hon. member that there were ample opportunities for hon. members to discuss this when the legislation on metric conversion was passed in this House. If members opposite will please quieten down, Madam Speaker, I should like to tell the hon. member that the suggestion he just made will be examined.

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[English]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

INEQUITIES MENTIONED IN REPORT OF COMMISSIONER

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Madam Speaker, my question is to the President of the Treasury Board in his capacity as minister responsible for the Official Languages Act.

I think he knows that yesterday the Commissioner of Official Languages under the act tabled his annual report in this House and it is really a cataloguing of inequities and injustices against French Canadians in the public service of this country. In particular, it points out that Francophones are vastly under-represented at the middle and senior echelons of the public service.

My question to the minister is this: Why has the government hesitated for so long in acting on equality of opportunity to work in French and to be served in French in the public service, especially when he is preaching every day in Quebec that that kind of equality exists which Mr. Yalden says in his report does not exist?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, let me say to the hon. member that I was disturbed, and somewhat disheartened, by some of the conclusions reached by the commissioner and by what he said. But I am also heartened by many of the things which he did not say, because there have been remarkable improvements in certain areas.

With regard to some of the criticism—on pay differential, for example—if one analyses it, one finds that it is largely because English-speaking civil servants are older and in the under forty group the pay levels are the same. This kind of thing is not contained in the report. I think these are facts that should be noted. I can assure the hon. member that we are examining the report carefully, and any positive action that we can take to further the objectives of Mr. Yalden, with which we can concur, we will take.

Mr. Nystrom: The minister did not answer the question.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question. Considering that Mr. Max Yalden has just shown that the problem is mainly one of attitude and action within the federal structure, the federal government, can the minister tell us what steps his government will take to achieve true equality between French and English in the federal government?

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, as I have just said, we will do all that is within our power to ensure the application of this policy. We have to start with the senior civil servants and with management. We must impose our will because, according to the commissioner's report, it is lacking. So, Madam Speaker, we will manifest our will.

REQUEST THAT JOINT COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGES BE ESTABLISHED

Mr. Serge Joyal (Hochelaga-Maisonneuve): Madam Speaker, considering the findings of the ninth report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, considering that last March the government tabled a motion in the House for the establishment of a joint committee on official languages, considering also that last December the right hon. prime minister, who is today on the opposition side, supported the establishment of such a committee, I wonder if the government House leader can tell us whether it is the government's intention of tabling a motion in the near future asking that the ninth report of the Commissioner of Official Languages be referred to a joint House-Senate committee.

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, that is an excellent suggestion which we could take up in the near future.