

Official Languages

Therefore, the meaning of the bill is completely misunderstood there, as it is also in eastern Canada. People think that when the bill is passed, a 65-year old English-speaking man will have to learn French, and vice versa.

This is not the object of the bill. The passing of a bill designed to have both official languages recognized does not necessarily mean the establishment of bilingualism. It merely means the recognition of the fact that there are two official languages in Canada: English and French.

We could also have included Chinese in the bill. We would then have had three official languages. This does not mean that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) would have to learn Chinese. But it would have been an official language if the legislation had contained a provision to that end.

An hon. Member: It would be a Chinese trick.

Mr. Caouette: Yes, indeed. I thought the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) would have included a third official language, Chinese, in view of the current discussions aiming at a commercial agreement with Communist China. It seems to me we might improve our diplomatic and commercial relations with China, if we knew that language.

However, this was not done, and the bill provides only for two official languages, without for all that depriving any Canadian of his rights.

When I travelled through the western provinces, I found that people were confusing the official languages bill and bilingualism, which are two different things. One is bilingual when one speaks two languages. But, one may be in favour of two official languages and yet, speak only one.

It is the case, for instance, of my colleagues who have no knowledge of English and who accept the principle of two official languages. Since some English-speaking members have no knowledge of French, they will recognize, I hope, this principle.

Once the principle of the official languages is explained, people understand what it is about and then, we can speak about bilingualism. At the national level, it is the business of the federal government. But, at the educational level, bilingualism comes under the jurisdiction of the provinces.

Therefore, all the federal government can do is to suggest, on the occasion of federal-provincial conferences, that English and

[Mr. Caouette.]

French be taught in schools, since education falls under provincial jurisdiction, a principle to be fully respected.

The federal government should not in any way whatsoever intervene in provincial fields.

Mr. Speaker, I said in western Canada that perhaps the official languages bill should never have been introduced in the house. If, 50 years ago, for instance, people had shown more good will on both sides, everybody would officially recognize both languages today and the subject would not have to be discussed in the house.

Because some people failed to take their responsibilities in the past, because some people on both sides proved narrow-minded and unwilling to reach some understanding, after 102 years of confederation, we find ourselves in 1969 discussing language rights to determine whether French and English should be recognized as official languages in Canada. However, better late than never. I wish to repeat, at any rate, that the principle of the two official languages does not constitute bilingualism.

Now, to get back to what I was saying a while ago, with regard to bilingualism in western Canada, everybody should not be compelled to learn both languages at the age of 50, for instance. Shall I ask my 81-year old father who has never spoken English to learn it? I would rightly be told that I am stupid.

Shall we ask the same thing to the English people? This is what the people out west are afraid of, to be compelled by the federal government to learn French. This is not the purpose of the bill. I told them that bilingualism will be a fact in Canada within a few years if all Canadians show the least bit of good will.

There is only one way to have a bilingual country where the people will understand one another all across it. The provinces must accept this principle and teach from the very first grades in school the two official languages of Canada—French and English—everywhere, in every Canadian school, in Quebec in British Columbia, in the Maritimes.

In five or six years from now, our youngsters who are now 6, 7 and 8 years old will be 12, 13 and 14 and then they will be perfectly bilingual. It is only then that we will have a bilingual country.

However we should not ask older people to become bilingual. We should not make matters worse. Do people know that this solution for teaching in schools has been approved in western as well as in eastern Canada?