

Bilingual Districts

● (1250)

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, the system of designation will not, as a consequence of this report, be changed. I think the hon. member is generally familiar with the current system of designation, the criteria used and the progress being made. This will not change as a consequence of these recommendations. I would ask him to repeat the second part of his question as I cannot recollect it.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, my question concerned the requirements with respect to bilingual districts outside the national capital. I was thinking of units working in French.

Mr. Drury: Units working in French are a matter of internal organization of the government. This question is not related to that of bilingual districts. As has been said, bilingual districts are to be delineated and proclaimed to ensure that the public in those districts can receive services from the federal government in either one of the official languages of their choice. The requirements necessary for units of the federal government working in French may or may not be related to those of the bilingual district but should not have any effect on their proclamation.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, may I ask another question? I am concerned about the question of designation and the necessity for the government's proposals to go forward in terms of the application of this capability. I ask if this capability for government services in bilingual districts is to be established by way of the process of decentralization, which is the cornerstone of a policy set out in certain documents I produced on September 3, 1975. Is it to be done in that way? Is the government contemplating additional man-years of employment in order to provide for positions which may be designated in bilingual districts?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, we have formulated a plan with which, I think, the hon. gentleman is familiar, to meet the requirements of the Official Languages Act. That plan has been elaborated and budgetary provision made to fulfil it. This proposal is, in a sense, merely declaratory of that plan, instead of an alternate plan. This is what we mean when we talk about implementation of this report without additional budgetary resources.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, may I ask a question concerning the government's present plan? Are we now to understand that when positions in bilingual districts in Alberta or Nova Scotia are designated bilingual, that people in those positions will be sent for language training? Or, will the government utilize additional man-years of employment or implement the program through a process of decentralization by moving public servants, in order to bring about what the government intends to do by reason of its acceptance of the report just brought forward? That is the question.

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. gentleman contemplates the achievement of a multiplicity of objectives through one plan. Unfortunately, this cannot be done. We have a plan for establishing institutional bilingualism within the public service, as required by the Official Lan-

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

guages Act. In addition, we have a proposal for decentralization in the interest of making the federal government more responsive to the people of Canada. These two programs are not directly related; they are separate. Attempting to achieve both objectives with one move will only lead to confusion in perception and execution.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I thought decentralization was related to phase two.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, at what level of employment in the bilingual districts will employees need to be bilingual? How far down in the structure, so to speak, will employees need to be bilingual? In other words, how far down will the prime consideration for employment be bilingual capacity?

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, briefly, it will vary from office to office and function to function. The requirement for bilingual capacity, or for institutional bilingualism, is based on ability to communicate with the public in either official language. In some instances it will mean that the elevator operator, to the extent that he must communicate with the public, should be able to do so in both official languages. Or, the person answering the telephone should be able to do so in both languages. The point is, there should be someone around who can perform all public functions necessary in this way. It is necessary for some person to do this in both or either of our official languages. How far down or up the scale such employees will be depends on their function, office and location.

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) for a supplementary question, I ought to tell hon. members that the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall) and the hon. member for Lachine-Lakeshore (Mr. Blaker), as well as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), want to ask questions. If questions are brief, I am prepared not to see the clock. But perhaps it is unrealistic to expect hon. members to limit themselves to a few minutes. I think therefore, the remaining questions should be put to the minister at two o'clock.

An hon. Member: One o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair until two o'clock this afternoon.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. When the House rose at one o'clock there was a question period in progress following a statement by the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Drury). Upon direction from the Speaker, I will recognize four more questioners and then we will go to government orders.

Mr. Forrestall: Mr. Speaker, my question is in two parts. It has to do with the consultative procedures envisaged