

The Address—Hon. J. N. Turner

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): All members of this House are deeply sensitive to the problems of making bilingualism in the public service a working reality in this country. All members and, I am sure, Your Honour, will recognize that nothing is more central to the unity of Canada, which we all seek to maintain, and nothing is more essential to the enduring partnership of the two founding peoples of this country. By now I think we all recognize that it is not enough for anyone in this House merely to assent to institutional bilingualism as a noble ideal and as a principle in support of the abstract. I make the point "institutional bilingualism" because what I am talking about now refers to bilingualism in the public service of Canada. It is that institutional bilingualism which should not be confused with individual bilingualism, the ability of any Canadian to speak either language.

Institutional bilingualism refers to the public service being conducted in either language, available to the people of Canada in either language, and the opportunity for any citizen to work in the public service of Canada in either language, thus preserving the right of any Canadian to remain unilingual if he wants. It is that distinction between individual and institutional bilingualism that I think must be made very carefully.

There is nothing abstract about the objectives of the Official Languages Act. I had some responsibility for introducing that piece of legislation in this House and I had some responsibility for negotiating its provisions with the western attorneys-general, with the attorneys-general of Ontario and Quebec and those in the Atlantic provinces, and there is nothing abstract about its objectives. It gives the authority of law for making the federal institution of Canada reflect the linguistic realities of this country. Surely, it is fundamental to the continuing unity of Canada that Canadians of either language be able to deal with the government and agencies of Canada in their own language. Surely, it is also fundamental to the unity of Canada that we should work toward Canadians being able to work in the public service of our country in the official language of their choice.

I do not think we need disguise the underlying motivations behind the policy of bilingualism. These were stated by the late Mr. Pearson in 1966 when he introduced his resolution in the House of Commons. It is to ensure that French-speaking Canadians have in reality in this country an equal opportunity and, just as important, that they be made to feel that they have an equal opportunity. It is an invitation particularly to young French-speaking Canadians in Quebec and elsewhere to exercise their option for Canada rather than to flirt with the dream of a separate nation state.

I have said on many occasions that nowhere is Canadian unity more important than in the National Capital. This city does not make any sense without a country and it is absolutely crucial for the prosperity of the people of Ottawa, the people of Hull and the people of the whole national capital region, that the policy of institutional bilingualism succeed.

It is a sign of the commitment of this House of Commons in principle and in practice that the Official Languages Act was supported by all parties when it was passed by the last parliament. Implementing the goals of

[Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton).]

that act has been a massive undertaking. A great task and great challenge has been to move toward the creation of a public service which truly serves both languages of Canada and the citizens of either language in this country; moving forward with speed and determination, responsive to the will of parliament, yet moving forward with the sense of equity and justice which was also within the collective mind of parliament. There were no charts, no guidelines. There were no paths well trodden. No nation in the world ever attempted this type of program on so large a scale. No body of experience has been revealed and only experience can reveal how the fundamental principles can be refined and developed in order to make the implementation of bilingualism more effective, more rational and more acceptable.

The guidelines which my colleague the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) enunciated last month represent a welcome and even, perhaps, overdue set of basic principles which will immeasurably aid the Public Service Commission and reassure public servants whether they be French-speaking, English-speaking or bilingual. The positive way in which these principles were accepted by all public service staff associations has, I believe, been most encouraging. The staff associations asked for a say in the identification and designation of bilingual positions. They will now have that say. New flexibility has been introduced into the whole program, a flexibility which at the same time protects careers, yet provides an opportunity for all civil servants.

Leaders of staff associations were forthcoming in their expression of willingness to try to make it work. In this latter connection, it is crucial that consultation and negotiation between the Treasury Board on the one hand and staff associations on the other be meaningful and genuine.

Mr. Lewis: And the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Yes, and the Public Service Commission, as the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) has interjected.

I am not going to attempt any exposition of the nine principles which the President of the Treasury Board has enunciated. I think there will be another occasion for the House to pronounce itself on this issue, and at that time I would like to intervene with an exposition of what I believe the principles mean in practice.

It is my privilege to be the representative of a constituency in this national capital region and a Member of Parliament for thousands of public servants both French and English-speaking. I happen to know in an intensely personal way how important it is to press ahead humanely and steadily, yet flexibly, toward the goal of making the public service of Canada an institution in which Canadians can work easily in the official language of their choice and through which citizens can deal with their government in either French or English.

I do not for a moment underestimate the human difficulties that will be encountered in trying to make this policy work, but the government is determined to make the policy work. We are also determined to make it fair. It has to be done in a way that takes into account the careers of men and women who work for the people of Canada in