

Privilege—Mr. Hamelin

Mr. Prud'homme: If I may, Mr. Speaker, I should like to deal for a few moments with this basic issue raised by the Hon. Member for Charlevoix.

You will remember Mr. Speaker, and so will Hon. Members who were here before 1984, the determination and dedication with which the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) pursued this matter. He showed tremendous courage at the time because a great many people were wondering what he was talking about whenever he raised the issue of bilingualism in Canada. Perhaps the Hon. Member wants to refer to the imprecise nature of the language used in the Official Languages Act. The Hon. Co-Chairman of the Committee on Official Languages is aware of it, because he co-chairs the committee with the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier whom he has known since he was elected in 1984. I congratulate him for his dedication to this important cause. We are not asking for favours but, for what I consider our basic rights. The Hon. Member for Charlevoix knows full well that, after his election, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier recognizing his interest in this issue, joined forces with him and they became friends of sort.

Before you reach any decision today, I submit, Mr. Speaker, that because this is a basic and non-partisan issue—The Hon. Member for Charlevoix has proved it. The Hon. Member for Outremont (Mrs. Pépin) has brought in new elements. My colleague and Acting Leader in the House, the Hon. Member for Saint-Jacques (Mr. Guilbault) commented on the matter. But it is the whole matter which has always been questioned. One day, we will have to reach a conclusion: Does the Official Languages Act apply to the House of Commons and the Senate, yes or no? We believe that it does. But others say no. This is a legal matter. I know that the Government is about to introduce major amendments to the Official Languages Act. It is a golden opportunity. Before Your Honour deals with this issue any further, he might want to get in touch with my colleague the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier who, for the first time since 1984—it is rather exceptional, a coincidence, I am sure, but is away today on official business. You are well aware, Mr. Speaker, of how attentively he has approached this question in the past, as I mentioned earlier, and before the Chair takes this matter under advisement over the next two weeks I am sure that the Chair might be interested in convening jointly the Hon. Member for Charlevoix and the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier since this is in fact an issue which goes beyond party politics.

If I may at the same time, as your president for Members' Services, avail myself of the opportunity—and a golden one it is for me—which the Hon. Member for Charlevoix has given us, I would like to raise the whole question of bilingual services for Members. I am here as a Francophone. First and foremost, I am here as a Canadian.

● (1530)

[*English*]

Mr. Prud'homme: I am here as a Canadian first. I have always said that, in both languages.

[*Translation*]

But I am a Quebecer and French is the primary language I have been using for the last 23 years. However, for reasons that have to do with the reality of Montreal, with the makeup of my own riding and with the membership of all committees, I am obligated to function in both languages, along with a minority of Members.

[*English*]

Some of us must face that daily. I have always asked Members, who I believe are reasonable and may use only one language, to understand, if they have difficulty functioning in one language and are recognized as first class Members of Parliament, how difficult it is for those of us who must function in both languages daily. I believe I am one of those Members. The law requires that I serve my electors in both languages and I like to attend every committee where both languages are used. While there is not a great percentage of Members who must do so, I feel that we are at a real disadvantage when we offer these services because we have the same staff and same background.

Your Honour and your predecessor were kind enough to acknowledge that there was a certain class in the House for services. I was pleased to recommend to you and your predecessor, Mr. Speaker, that we have certain services under the heading "territorial". My district is small, but I must use every language in the world. The Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Crombie) knows that every language is used in my district. However, we came to an agreement that some Members should receive supplementary services under the heading "territorial". Some Members have many more electors than others. In Toronto, for example, those Members may have two to three times as many electors as I. The committee would decide that since I can walk in my constituency, in which I have the average number of electors, I would receive a certain amount of money and not be a candidate for supplementary services. However, I have the additional difficulty of the fundamental requirement for bilingualism. In this respect, some Members are at a real disadvantage.

I am sure the Hon. Member for Charlevoix (Mr. Hamelin) will not press you for an immediate answer. While Your Honour is reflecting on this question, may I humbly submit that you should also consider the fact I have just brought to your attention publicly. I was going to do so privately, but since this is a non-partisan issue, I can raise it in public as well.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes to speak on this very important issue. First, we all recognize that the topic raised today has been brought to the attention of the House on several occasions as a result of interventions by the Hon.