

other areas, and to ensure that the principles of official bilingualism actually prevail.

I do not suppose there is much point in comparing Governments. The slanging that took place between the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) and some of his colleagues and members of the Liberal caucus a few minutes ago represented aspersions on the other in each case and obvious attempts to elevate their own standing in this particular struggle.

What is surely significant to recognize in how the struggle can be advanced is the role of the Commissioner of Official Languages. That office observes the activities of the federal Government, receives complaints, investigates them, and so on. The office of the commissioner takes us back to the early 1970s and the existence of a Joint Standing Committee on Official Languages. There is a committee of parliamentarians from both Houses which works together with the commissioner and receives information on the activities of government departments, agencies, and Crown corporations, and focuses on the fact that there is still all too often justified criticisms of the extent to which official bilingualism is operative in those various departments, agencies, and Crown corporations.

In listening to testimony, participating in questioning and considering the evidence that exists on those various institutions of the federal Government over the last three years, I have learned an enormous amount about institutional inertia. Very often I have found myself joining with others in criticism of the departments, agencies, and corporations in dealing with the deputy ministers and others who come before us.

For example, I recognize the difficulties in any short period of time in changing the proportions of employees in a department. That is not something that can be done in a year or in a few years, although at the end of 15 or 20 years of a policy one might expect that significant progress would have been made. By now it is quite fair to focus on those areas where still there is little representation of the official language minority, whether it is French-Speaking Canadians in one part of Canada, for example Atlantic Canada, the Prairies, northern Ontario, or the whole Province of Ontario, or one may think of the English-speaking minority in the Province of Quebec and the representation of members of that minority in the Public Service in the Province of Quebec.

Whatever hesitation one might have on these proportions and representation in local offices, there seems to me to be no excuse for shortcomings in the way of signs. There is very little excuse in the area of materials made available. These days there is less and less reason to be unable to serve the public when they approach an office by telephone. Surely with the technology available to us, and with any type of determination at all, the federal Government should appear in the way of official bilingualism in English and French across the country. Yet at this very late point we still find shortcomings in these matters that need to be redressed.

When we come to the question of the proportions in Government and actual advance in service we find reason to be

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quite concerned. It seems to me that two things have happened since the present Government took office in 1984. The decision to reduce the Public Service has made it very difficult to achieve real progress in improving the representation of the minorities in the Public Service of Canada in the various places. The administrative consolidation that has taken place also seems to raise questions, although in this area I would not be quite as assertive.

• (1250)

The attempt to increase responsibilities under the Official Languages Act of managers at lower levels in Departments and to phase out offices at the tops of Departments which are responsible for this makes it more difficult to be sure that that will mean setbacks in the actual development and maintenance of official bilingualism. However, I think there are dangers because managers at lower levels have a great many responsibilities. It is fairly clear, from some appearances before the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages, that the attempts to advance the principle of official bilingualism have certainly collided with the constraints on employment, the need to cut back in numbers, and so on. Consequently there has been less advance in these areas than we would have wanted. Those realities in the Government concern members of the committee from all sides.

I want to recognize the activities and the present circumstances of members of the Conservative caucus, just as I recognized earlier the activities of the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier in the days of the Liberal Government. In various ways we have all been trying to press for movement in institutions which can be so hard to move. We want a new Official Languages Act. We want the enactment of Bill C-72 to be moved forward and carried through as quickly as possible. I share the concern of the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier who proposed the motion that it should be done.

In saying that, I want to make a couple of criticisms of the Bill which have not been given very much play by the press. The Minister of Justice for his part this morning in commenting on the motion suggested that the Bill had been received with universal approbation, although when one listened carefully to what he read it was clear that it was not quite perfect as a piece of legislation. As someone who attempted at the press conference on June 25, 1987 to focus a couple of critical comments on the Bill and found the press not picking them up, I should like to put them on record this morning and to provide the basis for saying that there needs to be some debate on the Bill, even though the principle is accepted by most of us and the Bill has been applauded in quarters all around. I recognize that most of the Bill is very good, but there are clauses which could do with strengthening, particularly Clause 21 and Clause 38.

Clause 21 of the Bill notes the following:

Every federal institution has the duty to ensure that any member of the public can communicate with and obtain available services from its head or