

Bilingual Districts

to them from all over the country. In this respect, they have a major role to play in a bilingual country. The board recommended that regardless of the proportion of their population whose mother tongue or language of use is that of the minority, federal services to the public in these cities be made available in both official languages. The government recognizes the validity of this recommendation, which it accepts, and will ensure that where this demand exists, services will be provided by the federal government in both official languages.

[*Translation*]

Moreover, the board suggested that in any other large urban centre where 5,000 or more people currently use the official language of the minority, the demand for services of this minority be considered "significant" for the purpose of the act. The board therefore recommended that in these centres, the federal offices that come in contact with the public offer their services in both official languages. The government feels that this proposal is acceptable as concerns offices where there is a demand for such services, and as concerns the application proposed by the board for Vancouver, St. Catharines-Niagara, and four other large centres which are also provincial capitals, namely Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Quebec City. However, for the previously mentioned reasons, the government rejects the idea that this provides a sufficient guarantee of bilingual services in the metropolitan areas of Montreal and Sherbrooke. With this reservation, the government intends to implement this recommendation.

● (1210)

[*English*]

The advisory board recommended that all federal offices which acquired or will be acquiring the capability to conduct transactions in both official languages ensure that the public is fully aware of the availability of such services. The government intends to implement this recommendation as well.

Finally, the board recommended the establishment of a separate, continuing body to conduct research on language problems and policy in Canada. In view of present economic conditions and the scope of projects now being carried out in this sector by various public administrations, the office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and universities and institutions throughout the country, the government considers that establishment of such a body is unwarranted.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the government gratefully accepts the report of the Bilingual Districts Advisory Board, the considerable amount of data being placed at the public's disposal and the serious observations conveyed. According to the Official Languages Act, at least 90 days must elapse from today prior to any proclamation of bilingual districts. Accordingly, the government undertakes to proceed quickly but carefully, taking into account any further evidence which may arise and ensuring that none of these commitments involves any increase in the budgetary estimates. During this period we will be seeking the comments of the provincial governments.

[Mr. Drury.]

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, we have today before us a report for which we have been waiting since 1973, according to the estimates of the Commissioner of Official Languages and the wishes of the government. I must however emphasize that it concerned a very complex subject, which probably gave a lot of difficulty to the commission that had to ponder over and over again the problems and the task it had been assigned. That is certainly the cause of the delay. The whole matter of bilingual districts is very knotty, and this is revealed by the fact that four out of eight commissioners issued minority reports or statements. True, the government has accepted the principles in some of the dissident reports. You will see, as Mr. Spicer was saying in his second report, in 1972 I think, that this is a matter which will stir a lot of emotion. He was then wondering whether in fact the setting out of bilingual districts would not cause bigger problems than those the B and B Commission was trying to resolve with this initial recommendation which was in fact a principle or idea imported from Finland.

[*English*]

In his second annual report of 1972 or 1973—I forget the exact date—we saw that Mr. Spicer canvassed the many arguments pro and con on the concept of bilingual districts. I think it is fair to say that, having seen what had happened up to that time with regard to the implementation and acceptance of the Official Languages Act, Mr. Spicer came down on the side of seriously questioning the need for this concept. I should like to quote from page 31 of his report.

Finally, and in the commissioner's view far more impressively, bilingual districts may be unnecessary because of empirical evidence that the act has protected language rights surprisingly well for 2½ years without them.

He also says that section 9(2) of the Official Languages Act is the main reason for that. We have progressed some three years beyond the date of the observations of Mr. Spicer, and I would challenge anyone to demonstrate that there has not been in that interval, or there has not been since that interval, much more evidence that the act has not only protected but has engendered a greater acceptance of the principle of the Official Languages Act in Canada, and in fact has seen a marked expansion in the learning and use of both official languages. Therefore, I think one has to re-examine and reconsider Mr. Spicer's original commentary pro and con in light of the situation today.

[*Translation*]

As the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Drury) has said, the government support the conclusion of the Fox commission recommending that the concept of bilingual districts be accepted, and they even said they were willing to initiate the proclamation of bilingual districts, while presenting at the same time the amendments they propose, in short, their decision on this question.

I have had the opportunity to read this report only this morning and it is difficult for me, as for my colleagues, to make elaborate comments on the matter because there is a trap in all this. I hope we will not fall into it. We should not be led into considering the detail of each district where the borders and limits have been indicated, and then lose sight of the whole thing.