

Official Languages

instance, how does one interpret the words of the amendment "inadequate acquaintance with either of the official languages"? It seems to me that this phrase defies definition and, consequently, application. The same problem arises in connection with the phrase "willingness to learn". The point was made very succinctly by the hon. member for Greenwood (Mr. Brewin).

Mr. Horner: Who gets the 7½ per cent increase in pay?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): If applied in the rigid statutory form it could be fulfilled by a candidate simply saying: "Yes, I am willing to acquire a second language." I agree with the hon. member for Greenwood that if this concept were set out in statutory form it would render ineffective not only the clause which the hon. member seeks to amend, but the entire bill.

This is a subjective concept difficult of objective definition and application. There may well be various degrees of willingness. One person might be willing to learn but not willing to make the effort required in order to succeed. As the hon. member for Greenwood said—and this is confirmed by the experience of everybody in the house who has immersed himself in the second language—willingness is one thing, but the persistence necessary to acquire a satisfactory knowledge of the second language is another.

For these reasons the government cannot accept this proposal. We are committed to the principle set out in section 20 of the Public Service Employment Act. We are committed jointly with the governments of the early 'thirties, the early 'sixties, under the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker), and of 1967, to the establishment and development of that principle.

In the third place, we do not believe that the rigid concept set forth in the amendment—

Mr. Horner: There is nothing rigid about it at all.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):—should be put into law, particularly when that concept is difficult to define and not easily applicable.

With respect, the point about which the hon. member is concerned is a valid one but I do not think he has put forward the appropriate solution. The government is concerned as to the necessity for applying a bilingual policy for the Public Service of Canada with equity and justice. The people of French

speaking Canada who complain of 100 years of injustice—

Mr. Horner: Two hundred.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): It is not necessary to reciprocate that injustice with another against the majority of the people of Canada by an unjust application of what we believe to be a legitimate policy.

● (8:30 p.m.)

Mr. Horner: You are saying that two wrongs make a right.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): No, two wrongs do not make a right.

Mr. Horner: That is what you are saying in this bill.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): We deny that categorically, and I say that through you, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member for Crowfoot. We contend that the hon. member's solution would be impracticable, one not capable of realization.

I have reviewed with the chairman of the public service commission, and the government is also reviewing with him, the two aspects of this policy which must always remain in mind. They are, first of all, that no one should be penalized, either by way of recruitment or by promotion, for his failure to have a second language until he is given adequate opportunity to learn that second language. That is the policy of the government of Canada which was first enunciated in 1966 by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Pearson, and it is still our policy today. We are in continual contact with the Public Service Commission to see that this policy is ensured.

Secondly, as Mr. Pearson said in 1966—and this statement still governs today—no one who was recruited to the public service of this country under what he believed were different ground rules should be subjected to a situation where government policy, in his mind, has changed without being given an opportunity to learn the other language, or at least to preserve his career that was launched under different circumstances. In justice to members of the public service who have a certain seniority in service to the people of Canada, they have certain rights and at least must be given the opportunity to learn that second language; and this we recognize as part of the policy of the administration of government.