

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

CONGRATULATIONS TO MR. ALBERT ST. AMOUR ON
RETIREMENT AS DEPUTY-SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

Mr. Speaker: Before commencing the Oral Question Period, may I say that I know hon. members will have noticed that this morning the mace was carried in the usual procession by the Assistant Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Albert St. Amour, who today is marking—I know hon. members would want to join me in also marking the occasion—41 years of public service, 36 years and six months of which have been in the service of the House of Commons. Indeed, it was exactly at that time 36 years and six months ago today that he was promised he could start the job here the next day. It will be exactly 36 years and six months on May 7, and on this occasion we are marking Mr. St. Amour's last day here. He is standing at the end of the Chamber, and I am sure all hon. members would want to wish him well.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

BILINGUALISM

POSSIBILITY OF BAN ON FEDERAL EXPANSION IN QUEBEC IN
VIEW OF LANGUAGE POLICY

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister. Over the past weeks since the introduction of Bill No. 1 in the Quebec Assembly, we have had from ministers of this government a crescendo of veiled threats, innuendos and insinuations. We have heard the Minister of Supply and Services imply in committee this week that the passage of Bill No. 1 in its present form would mean a cutback in the federal presence in Quebec. Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce have taken the same tack. This morning there are reports of a statement by the president of Via Rail who has indicated that he is reconsidering his plans to relocate in Montreal.

With respect, Mr. Speaker, I think it is time for the government to either fish or cut bait. I want to ask the Acting Prime Minister to tell the House clearly and unequivocally whether it is indeed this government's policy, in the event that Bill No. 1 passes unchanged, that it will put a ban on further federal expansion into the province of Quebec?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, no, that decision has not been taken, nor could it have been taken on a speculative hypothesis. It is still the hope of the government that the bill, which is not yet law, will be modified in the course of the legislative process and that a more moderate approach will be adopted by the Quebec government with respect to this bill. My hon. friend will

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remember that some days ago the Prime Minister did express the view of the government generally on this bill. The view he expressed was to the effect that its primary purpose, which is to strengthen the French language in Quebec, was desirable; but it was regrettable that it impinged upon certain minority rights. That is the extent of the view I would like to express today in respect of that bill. Obviously, it is a very complex piece of legislation which is still before the National Assembly. It may be that the government will be giving further views later.

PROPOSED CONSULTATIONS WITH QUEBEC TO PROTECT
FEDERAL LANGUAGE POLICY

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the answer, but I would hope the Acting Prime Minister would instruct his cabinet colleagues as to what the policy of the government really is. Thus far the response from this government has been some trumpeting from the sidelines and nothing very constructive in terms of dealing with the government of the province of Quebec. I will ask the Acting Prime Minister, with respect to that point, whether the federal government, the ministers, or others are now involved in active discussions directly with the government of Quebec to ensure that the language rights, which the Acting Prime Minister spoke of embodied in the policies of bilingualism, which are the policies of this government, are being protected within the province of Quebec?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister dealt with that question some time ago in response to a question by the Leader of the New Democratic Party. He expressed the view that at this point discussions were not taking place between the Prime Minister of Canada and the Premier of Quebec, and that at the moment it did not appear that such discussions would take place with respect to this bill.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, that is a very strange answer in view of what we face in this country. It seems to imply that the white paper and Bill No. 1 are hypothetical matters. I want to say that that bill is not hypothetical. There is a parliamentary commission preparing to meet in the province of Quebec. Those hearings are to begin very shortly. Since the precedent for the giving of provincial testimony before standing committees of this House on legislation which affects them is well established, the principle itself being well established, will the Acting Prime Minister tell the House if the government intends to make a statement to the parliamentary commission which will consider the impact of Quebec's Bill on the language rights of Canadians?

● (1120)

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, no such action has been decided upon and one would have to consider whether such intervention by the federal government in the legislative processes of the province of Quebec would be productive in this particular case. Probably it could have the reverse effect.