

Privilege—Mr. Ernie Epp

during the past summer when the House was sitting in August and committees were at work. Even during the spring, the Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for this area conceded that the costs of contracting out were beginning to exceed the cost of work done in house. That strikes me as a most serious situation. Inefficiency is created or resulting from a situation which costs us more than it would to do this work properly within the Translation Bureau.

This is an important matter of national culture. I wish to conclude by pointing out that this country has been practising institutional bilingualism for almost 20 years. It requires the provision of high quality translation, interpretation and terminology services by the federal Government. Any breakdown in such arrangements, as the basis for our institutional bilingualism, 19 years after the Official Languages Act was passed, and following the previous ruling by Speaker Lamoureaux in 1968, I would submit, can be regarded as a question of privilege.

I would appreciate your careful consideration of the question, Mr. Speaker. I am prepared to move the necessary motion if, in your insight and wisdom, you find this to be a genuine question of privilege.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I should like to participate very briefly in this debate. Unlike the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay—Nipigon (Mr. Epp) I did not have time to get prepared to debate the matter at length. What I do know and what all Members of the House know is that it is an important question. But there are also very special considerations that must be kept in mind when discussing translation versus interpretation, and in this case I do not think the Hon. Member is referring to the quality of interpretation in the House. I think it is a facility of which we are very proud and which all Members view as an outstanding service.

Of course the matter of translation has always come under the Secretary of State (Mr. Crombie) who, through his department, is responsible for providing translation services for the House of Commons. This service is not provided by the Chair, but by a Government department, namely the Secretary of State. To the extent that I can appreciate it, service has long been of exceptional quality and, to me anyway, a source of inspiration in terms of the translation of the remarks made by Hon. Members in this House.

As far as I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, we went through exceptional times this summer. The House was recalled on August 11. The Committee on the Constitution held hearings and, like the Hon. Member, I agree that there were some delays related to translation.

● (1600)

[*English*]

The point which should be made is that as a client of the Department of the Secretary of State, whose services the

House of Commons has purchased over the years, we have had some difficulties in terms of the two main problems to which the Hon. Member alluded. Of course, one problem is the cut-backs in the public servants who are usually attached to the translation service. There have been some serious cut-backs, which have reduced the translation capacity, although at times, I must admit, I have many good words for the high quality which has been maintained in many circumstances.

There is also the fact that much of the work is now being contracted out by the Secretary of State Department according to a policy which the Government has espoused over the three years that it has been in power. It believes that a lot of contracting out saves money and is a way of cutting expenditures. I do not believe that. I do not believe that it maintains quality. I do not believe that it does anything for the services which are essential to the operation of the House.

Therefore, the contracting out and cut-backs in public servants have had a direct effect upon the work-load of translators who are sometimes expected to produce much more than the usual 1,100 to 1,500 words per day. Anyone can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that that is very difficult in the field of policy, politics, or the very technical language sometimes used in the House.

I commend the Hon. Member for raising this point with the House. I cannot say that it is a question of privilege, but it is very important to say to the Government of the day that indeed it should recognize the importance of Parliament and the importance of the services rendered to Parliament.

We should not cut back or reduce those services on the basis of some false economic theory which says that we should not give to public servants the amount of work which would normally be acquired but that we should contract it out because it cannot be done in-house. That is wrong.

I also think that cutting back on public servants whose work-load is increasing day in and day out is wrong. It is wrong for the Government to maintain those two policies—one of cutting back on public servants and the other of cutting back on the amount of work being done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Speaker, I am sure you are not surprised to see me rise to take part in this debate. On several occasions in the past I raised this issue from a constructive perspective.

[*English*]

Every time we talk about bilingual services or bilingualism, I know that an aura of nervousness hovers over the House. I have always tried over the years to be very cool about the matter. This is why I often raised the question with you, Mr. Speaker, and with previous Speakers as gently and as fairly as I could in private. Very rarely did I participate in a debate of this kind in the House, but I did so eventually in public because we needed action.