

Private Bills

evade the law or to create an exemption of some kind, such as an order in council, to get round the act. I feel the government should make a thorough investigation of the civil service—therein lies its basic work.

Hon. Théogène Ricard (St. Hyacinthe-Bagot): Mr. Speaker, I only have a few words to say about the measure now before us.

First, I should like to congratulate my friend, the hon. member for Joliette-L'Assomption-Montcalm (Mr. Pigeon) for introducing a measure intended to increase bilingualism in the civil service.

I would not let such an opportunity go by—that is why I rose to speak—without making a few remarks following those of the hon. member for St. James (Mr. Rinfret) and the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond (Mr. Prittie).

For the few minutes he took part in this discussion, the hon. member for St. James upbraided us. He said that when we were at the helm, we did very little to favour bilingualism. Now, I should like to point out to the hon. member for St. James and to all hon. members the initiatives we took in this respect. For instance, we introduced simultaneous interpretation and bilingual cheques, we corrected the forms of the last census in 1961; we appointed a French Canadian governor general. Moreover, I avail myself of this opportunity to remind the house that, when I came here in 1957, practically all notices on parliament hill, inside as well as outside, were in English only. I took action to obtain the required change and, today, we can see that all, or almost all, such notices are bilingual.

And I shall ask those who might question what I am now saying to give a telephone call to the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Deschatelets), to whom I recommended as recently as last week to replace a unilingual by a bilingual plate.

As far as the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond is concerned, I think that his way of looking at bilingualism would result in encouraging separatism.

According to his theory, bilingualism should be confined to the province of Quebec, or to those localities where French is needed. Now, Mr. Speaker, how could bilingualism be favoured throughout the country if you adopt an attitude which would limit bilingualism to a single area?

Those are the few remarks I wanted to make, and I beg the hon. member for St. James not to look for any bitterness where

[Mr. Marcoux.]

he is concerned. I wanted simply to remind him of some facts which he probably knew anyway.

[Text]

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Carleton): Mr. Speaker, it is now three minutes to six o'clock. There are many things I should like to say about the bill but the time remaining to me unfortunately does not permit. Many points have been made in the debate concerning the development of a bilingual policy in the public service. I should like to say at the very beginning that I do not think there is any doubt whatsoever in the minds of the overwhelming majority of members of the house that we are determined to promote the highest possible degree of bilingualism so that a person communicating with any department of the government will have the right to receive full and complete information in whichever official language the correspondence is initiated. I am sure that every department is actively recruiting with this in mind to make sure that the service which is the right of every taxpayer is rendered, according to fundamental respect for this principle.

But, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me there is a great gap between this principle and the legislation before us. The legislation before us would in effect adopt a quota system. It would say that within a quota the language requirement would take precedence over all other requirements for appointment. I have serious doubts whether this is administratively feasible. If it is feasible, there are certain absolutely minimum requirements which would have to be respected by the civil service commission.

The first of them, Mr. Speaker, is the definition and determination in the language of the bill of who is competently bilingual, which language refers to people "who are capable of speaking and writing fluently in both the English and the French languages". I ask my good friend, the mover of the bill, if he considers himself to be a bilingual person and I understand that his answer is yes. I respect his competence in the two languages, but I would point out to the hon. member that I know there are circumstances where he has some difficulty with the English tongue, just as I have some difficulty with the French tongue. I have made an effort as a member of the house and as a citizen of Canada to try to understand the two languages as best I can.

Mr. Pigeon: If you will use your brains you will see what I mean by bilingual.