

Official Languages Act

Canadians want to be bilingual. We should teach French in schools from kindergarten on. The ability to absorb a second language falls drastically from the age of six. This has been proven by Chomsky, the father of linguistics who I studied in anthropology and who is still alive and well at MIT. Put it in the schools, but do not jam it down our throats through a Bill that takes away people's rights. Who wants this Bill? Is this what Canadians really want? Let us be very clear. The bilingualization of all Canadians means a great deal of expense, energy and effort. It is not fair and it is a decision which should not be taken lightly. Without having to resort to a complex and expensive poll, I can tell Hon. Members that the answer is no, my constituents do not want this, westerners do not want it and most maritimers do not want it. Even some people from Quebec do not want it. Certainly I believe that the provinces in general do not want it. I wish we could have a secret ballot on this. I wish this Bill would be amended drastically or would be totally withdrawn. I challenge Members from all parts of the House to think very carefully on it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Malépart: Madam Speaker, I certainly do not share the views just expressed by my colleague, particularly when he claims that Anglophones in Quebec are not allowed to speak and that bilingualism is a fact of life in the rest of Canada.

I should like the Hon. Member to tell me whether he accepts the fact that a French-speaking MLA, say in Alberta, is not allowed to use his mother tongue, French of course. So how can he tell us that the rest of Canada is bilingual, but that Quebec is not? I think that is false.

I would like to know his views. Why be so strongly opposed to this Bill which would ensure that federal institutions provide services in both official languages throughout the country but which does not apply to all provincial legislatures?

Can the Hon. Member tell us how come he is so dead set against Quebec's Bill 101 and yet does not say anything about the other provinces, about MLAs like those in Alberta who dare not speak French lest they be dragged before the court?

[*English*]

Mr. Stewart: Madam Speaker, I am not opposed to bilingualism where the numbers warrant it in all federal institutions as the Act spells it out now. Leave it alone; it is not broken, do not fix it.

How would we expect the people of Alberta to ever countenance bilingualism in the Alberta Government on the strength of what has happened in the Province of Quebec with Bill 101, with Meech Lake in limbo and with all the things that have gone on there? I do not recall hearing of any fire-bombings or mailbox-bombings in Alberta. I do not recall hearing of a linguistics struggle in Alberta.

I might point out that the English-speaking population of the Province of Quebec is more than that of many of the western provinces themselves. The problem exists and we know it. However, this Bill will not correct it.

Again, I would like to reiterate for the Hon. Member that I champion bilingualism from kindergarten up in the educational system, not through phoney legislation designed to force francophone participation in Canada. That is what this Bill is, make no mistake about it. It does not force Anglophones into positions. I would meet the Hon. Member at any time, and I want it clearly understood that I do not oppose the French language but I certainly oppose this Bill.

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to comment briefly on this speech and to do so in English. I am a Member who challenges the question that has been asked, who speaks for English-Canada?

This has been an extraordinarily divisive speech behind the protestations of support for national unity, support for bilingualism and support for the Official Languages Act of 1969. It makes me as a member of the Joint Standing Committee on Official Languages think that we really do work there in one of those solitudes that this country has known far too often.

It is quite clear to us, dealing with agencies of the Government and officials who head Departments, that the Official Languages Act points to the changes that are being proposed by this Bill. The Hon. Member recognizes that bilingualism is advancing in various Departments, which is not to say that there are 85 per cent Francophone Canadians in the Official Languages Commissioner's office but rather that 85 per cent of the persons there are capable of working in both languages. When he brings that kind of reality into the question to pander to the fears of some parts of the Canadian population, he is doing something extraordinarily divisive.

I realize that it is one o'clock. One could say a great deal more, but I, as one Canadian who speaks English far better than French, regret what the Hon. Member has said.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Order, please. It being one o'clock I do now leave the chair until 2 p.m. later this day.

The House took recess at 1 p.m.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

STATEMENTS PURSUANT TO S. O. 21

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

JOB SECURITY FOR RURAL CONTRACT AGENTS—NEED FOR GOVERNMENT TO MAKE CORRECT DECISIONS

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Some time ago, Mr. Speaker, I called the attention of the House on