

Official Languages

for the future of Canada. If the government and the commissioner in particular appreciate the need to win support for what is being done, to win the consent of the people who are to be governed by this law, to remove fears, to allay doubts, to produce and evoke co-operation and sincerity, then this law will be a great step forward toward the greater unity of the people across this great land.

As one looks round the world, Mr. Speaker, one sees internal conflict everywhere. One is saddened by the fratricidal war in Nigeria-Biafra, by racial conflicts in the United States, by the inhumanity of white rule in South Africa and Rhodesia, by the purposeless religious strife in Ireland and by the occasional outbursts of violence between the two linguistic communities in Belgium. On every continent, in every part of the world, there are conflicts among tribes and, among peoples of different languages and cultures. There are wars and near wars. I watch these and other destructive events across the world and I pray, as I am sure all hon. members pray, that my country may be able to avoid fratricidal strife and that our people will find rational and humane solutions to the differences which divide them and to the potential conflicts which darken our future.

It is in this context that I regard this bill as a necessary step in the direction of Canadian unity. Other steps will have to follow quickly and resolutely in the social and economic spheres of our collective lives. We will have to take steps much more quickly than this government has been willing to take them to deal with the high cost of living, with the regional inequalities in the country, with the foreign ownership of our economy, with the ruthless use of power by the corporate conglomerates of this country and with the way in which the lives of our people, their future and security are overlooked and even ignored by events over which they have no control.

We shall have to find quickly and resolutely ways in which the people of this country can play a meaningful part in deciding their own destiny and in overcoming the alienation from which they suffer in a society governed by big government, big industry, big unions, big corporations and bigness of every sort. Much more quickly and resolutely than this government is willing to do, we shall have to find ways to deal with the problems arising in the ever increasing urban communities of this country and make the collective life of our people in our cities a good deal more pleasant and meaningful than it is now.

[Mr. Lewis.]

It is the totality of these measures and not only language rights, it is the totality of social and economic solutions to deep-seated social and economic problems, which will lay the true foundation for unity in this country and which can make us in Canada an example of rational development and achievement. In the meantime I express the hope that the long overdue recognition of the bilingual character of Canada which is embodied in the principle of the bill before us will be accepted with grace and understanding in all parts of this country.

• (2:40 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): Order. Does the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce wish to put a question to the hon. member for York South?

Mr. Pepin: I should like to put a very serious question to him, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member for York South is giving us excellent reasons to show that the bill is most important for our young people, for the minorities, for French-speaking Canadians, etc. At the same time, he tells us that the bill should not have been introduced at this time. If absolute priority is to be given to social and economic questions, as the hon. member suggests, when then could a bill such as this be introduced?

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, true bilingualism would have it that the minister speak French and that I might answer him in English.

[*English*]

I say to the minister that it would have been sensible, responsible and sensitive to have spent a period of approximately ten days between the Criminal Code amendments and the languages bill dealing with bills such as the industrial incentive bill, housing, a bill dealing with higher pensions for retired civil servants or some other matters. There would still have been time enough to deal with this bill as well. The point I was making, Mr. Speaker, and the minister's question gives me the opportunity to emphasize it, is not that I necessarily oppose this priority because I am afraid of what may happen by virtue of this bill. I have no such fears.