

Official Languages

I am trying to urge and create is an atmosphere of national unity and not disunity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: I suggest this is important in order to create a sense of belonging for these many Canadians, a sense of belonging to the country, of participation in its life, as well as providing a service of very real assistance to them.

And I suggest it is also important at this time, when we are considering the extension of government services in the two official languages, French and English, that we encourage and recognize the existence of these many other cultures of native peoples who have come from many other lands, and that we must go to some trouble to indicate to them that this step that is being taken does not in any way allow them to feel that their cultures are not appreciated, are not welcome.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: I would suggest in all seriousness that it might be possible for the committee to devise a preamble to the bill which would have such an effect.

The Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) also spoke about instruction. I know it is the policy of the governments in many of the provinces to provide courses in other languages where it is considered that the number of people is large enough to justify this procedure. I would like to think that at the time this step which we are discussing today is being taken the federal government will positively encourage the provinces to continue this policy and perhaps assist them in amplifying it. I am not talking now of languages of instruction but rather of instruction in these other languages. It is important in trying to take a necessary step to increase national unity that we do not create new forms of national disunity, and I feel we can do this if we set our minds to it.

Virtually everything in the bill is now within the power of the Governor in Council without legislation. I am so advised by lawyers I consider competent. Therefore it is not a question of the bill providing the government with additional authority. The bill is not, therefore, a sort of Magna Carta. It is rather a declaration of policy by parliament, and a declaration of the means of implementation of this policy. Again, sir, whether it works for good or ill will therefore depend to a very large degree upon the administration of the bill.

[Mr. Stanfield.]

One defect in the bill as it is now drafted is that it provides inadequate opportunities for parliament to examine and criticize the manner in which the bill is administered and the practices adopted under it. For example, there is provision for the reports of the commissioner to be tabled in the house, but there is no way to get such a report off the table unless the government takes it off or unless the opposition uses an opposition day for that purpose. The bill even makes provision for the commissioner to make a report to the Speaker where the commissioner considers a matter of sufficient urgency, but here there is no provision for this report to get before the house for discussion. I think the committee should carefully consider increasing and improving the opportunities of the house to examine and discuss the administrative practices that are adopted in connection with the bill.

The bill does not name the responsible minister. Here I am getting on to a subject of some delicacy, Mr. Speaker, but I have emphasized the importance of administration. I have emphasized that the bill will either help or harm national unity depending on how it is administered, and therefore it is essential that the minister in charge of the administration of the act be a man who has the confidence of the Canadian people in terms of fairness and good sense. I am sure it does not matter to the Canadian people whether he is French speaking or English speaking, but it is of vital importance that he be regarded by the Canadian people as an open-minded, fair-minded and sensible Canadian in this regard.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: No doubt we will be suggesting amendments, but it is difficult to discuss this at the moment. We do not know what amendments the Minister of Justice will be bringing forward, a procedure which I again say seems to be absolutely inexcusable in the discussion of a measure that is designed to bring the house and the country together, but I would certainly urge the committee to examine methods of improving the opportunities of the house to scrutinize and discuss the manner in which the bill is administered. I would hope too that the committee would consider the definition of the bilingual districts to see if it can be improved upon.

● (12:30 p.m.)

I come back, sir, to the evidence that there is widespread concern and misunderstanding—concern regarding the way in which the