

*Official Languages*

Government members may say there are various ways to get the report off the table. No doubt they will point out that we now have opposition days and that this matter could be taken up on opposition days. I say there are enough things going on over there to occupy all the opposition days the government has seen fit to give us without discussing the report of the languages commissioner. We should not be required to use an opposition day to discuss such a report. Surely, the representatives of the people of Canada should be given something more than an opportunity to read the report of the languages commissioner. Surely, they should be given the opportunity to discuss that report in parliament. In essence that is all the amendment we are introducing now asks. We raised this matter before the committee. The government members saw fit to argue that if we extended this privilege to parliament we would be taking away some of the powers of Mr. Speaker; that we would be interfering with the procedures of the house, that the house is master of its own rules and that no statute of parliament should regulate the procedure of this house.

I suggest, with all respect, that there are today laws of this country which do regulate the procedure of parliament, and no serious exception has been taken to them over the years. If we examine the British North America Act we will find that sections 44, 45, 46 and 47 deal specifically with the Speaker of this house. Section 48 of the British North America Act deals with a matter so important as our quorum. Section 49 deals with a matter so important as our voting. Sections 53 and 54 deal with the procedure in respect of our appropriations, and tax bills as well as money bills. Section 91 of the British North America Act has a provision which requires a two-thirds vote on a particular question. These are examples of the procedure of this house being regulated by statute and incidentally by a statute which actually is not a Canadian statute. The British North America Act is a statute passed by the parliament of the United Kingdom.

• (4:50 p.m.)

Since the 1949 amendment we have been able to amend certain of our rules of procedure, but we have to do so, by an act of parliament and not by a standing order of the house. So we say in all seriousness that it is not valid to object to the amendment on the ground that we are trying to control the

[Mr. McQuaid.]

actions of the house by a statute, and this was never done before. It has been done before. We suggest that this safeguard should be written into the act. Subclause 4 of our amendment reads as follows:

Where a member of the House of Commons, on or before the third sitting day next following the day the Speaker of that house tables any report made by the commissioner under section 33, asks leave to move the adjournment of the house for the purpose of discussing the report as a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, the matter shall be deemed proper to be discussed and shall thereafter be proceeded with in accordance with the provisions of the standing order of the house applicable to the subsequent stages of the proceeding.

I realize that the amendment does in a sense take away from the Speaker some of the powers he ordinarily exercises under our standing orders. When we introduced the amendment we had in mind the intent of the bill itself, namely, that if the commissioner considered a matter to be so urgent that it required immediate attention, he would not have to wait until he submitted his annual report but could make a special report to parliament. We thought that if the matter was so urgent that it required a special report to parliament, nothing would be wrong with requiring that the report be debated immediately.

We do not want to do anything that would lessen the power and discretion exercised by the Speaker and, I must say, exercised very wisely in most cases. In the light of that, and upon reflection, we decided that it would perhaps be more acceptable if subclause 4 were struck from our amendment and it were confined to subclause 5, which reads:

The annual statement to parliament made by the commissioner under this section, when tabled respectively in the Senate and House of Commons, shall thereupon be referred in each house to a committee designated by the Speaker.

The hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) will introduce an amendment which will have the effect of striking out subclause 4 of our amendment, but providing that the annual statement of the commissioner, and any other report the commissioner sees fit to make to parliament, shall be referred to a committee designated by the Speaker. What can possibly be wrong with an amendment of that kind? All we ask is that the report of the commissioner, rather than lying on the table where it will probably die, be referred to a committee of this house.

Many reports are referred to committees of the house. It is absolutely useless to ask