

Official Languages

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I accept the right hon. member's courtesy without accepting the full import of his remarks.

I might say by way of background that I recognize the difficulty in respect of the acceptance of this bill in certain parts of Canada. I recognize the objections that were expressed about it in parts of western Canada, in the rest of English speaking Canada and in Quebec, and I recognize particularly the objections to the bill, not in principle but in what Premier Bertrand referred to as "les modalités", in that the concept of bilingual districts would in his opinion and in the opinion of the government of Quebec, as envisaged in the bill, serve to ghetto the minorities of French Canadians in other parts of Canada. This concept would serve to encircle those minorities in rural parts of our country outside Quebec and would fail to recognize the mobility of Canadians and the possibility of French speaking Canadians living in the great cities of our country. When I deal in some detail with the amendments I now propose I think hon. members will recognize that we have gone a long way to create more flexibility and opportunity for service in either language, beyond the concept of bilingual districts.

On February 17 I discussed this bill clause by clause with the four western Attorneys General at a meeting in Victoria. The position I took on behalf of the federal government was one of flexibility in detail, commitment in principle. Many of the suggestions made by the western Attorneys General were constructive and revealed an understanding of the essence of the bill. I go on the assumption, in dealing with provincial governments, that they are as strongly convinced in their Canadianism as I and other members of this government are, and I listen to them and deal with them as Canadians.

The purpose of these amendments is to avoid the confrontation by some provinces in the courts and make practical accommodations where we felt it was necessary and reasonable to do so. What were the principal criticisms of this bill that I heard in western Canada? I think it would be useful to put this on record here in the House of Commons.

The first criticism I heard was in the form of the question, why force us into bilingualism by legislation when by gradual consent it can be achieved in due course? I would concede that there has been great progress made in the last two, three or four

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

years by provincial governments toward recognizing a wider use of both languages, and by widening the opportunities of education for young Canadians to learn both languages at an earlier age when it is easier.

The answer to this objection, to my mind, is that this legislation is a matter of converting symbols into reality. If we mean what we say we will put it into writing. I believe this will be concrete evidence of good faith on the part of the English speaking majority of Canadians and the French speaking majority in Quebec, that is, to enshrine these principles recognized in this bill in the legislation of Canada. Rights can only be protected by law. No amount of good will, and I believe there is growing good will in Canada, can substitute for that.

The second objection I met was a feeling that some people had in respect of the problems of implementing this legislation in that it would involve the Canadian people in additional cost. In answering this comment one must bear in mind that educational facilities have to be improved across Canada to equip the next generation of Canadians with greater facility in either language than most of us have been able to obtain. I believe our children must be given an opportunity to learn a second language.

In my opinion the cost of bilingualism is part of the price of being Canadian. If bilingualism is a national policy, then the federal government will have to make a contribution toward implementing it.

Mr. Caouette: Welcome to this side.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Let me say to the hon. member that it is a comfort that he is on my side for a change.

The third objection I met, and I am sure hon. members have also had occasion to hear this objection, relating to the bill is that there will be a great many technical difficulties involved in implementing it.

● (3:40 p.m.)

There is, for example, in this country a lack of qualified interpreters, stenographers and translators. The number at present is definitely too small to handle all the immediate requirements. The answer to this is that the obvious flexibility in the bill itself gives time for a gradual process in its implementation.

A fourth objection—this was an objection which I found very serious indeed—was that some people, particularly in western Canada,