

*Official Languages*

put to me, that the Commissioner of Official Languages should be aware of the situation, should make sure whether the legislation was enforced or not, but that the only means—and this is important—to which the Commissioner can resort to enforce the legislation is to report to the house.

Can we really compare a report to the house with a sentence passed by a judge on an accused appearing before him?

The hon. member for Cardigan went so far as to say several times "the accused" shall appear before the Commissioner. This proves how much he misunderstood, if he understood at all, the wording of that legislation, because there is actually no mention of any accused in this bill, and the Official Languages Commissioner is not a judge. If anyone were accused, and if the Commissioner were a judge, then the remarks of the hon. member for Cardigan and even a few of those of the hon. member for Calgary North would have some meaning. But nobody is accused. It happens that the Commissioner, in the role of an investigator, first of all examines the situation and then, as he sees fit, reports to the Parliament of Canada.

● (9:00 p.m.)

When the hon. member for Cardigan talks of the "accused", perhaps he refers to another legislation or interprets this legislation in his own way; however, he does not speak of the legislation under study and which he wishes to amend. Likewise, when he denounces the dreadful powers granted to the Commissioner of Official Languages for Canada, I must admit that I am at a loss to understand what he means; in the same vein, perhaps we should decide right now tonight that the Auditor General holds dreadful powers and is an intolerable inquisitor, and, instead of wasting our time amending that official languages bill, putting aside current business, abolish the post of Auditor General, for he holds precisely the same type of powers that are given to the Commissioner of Official Languages, that is, essentially, the power to investigate freely and to report to the house or to a committee of the house on his findings.

I therefore do not understand why the hon. members of the opposition, who tolerate, and have done so for a long time now, an institution called the Auditor General, should all of a sudden become so concerned and should shout about civil liberties being strangled, because a Commissioner of Official Languages will have similar powers in an area which is

[Mr. Pelletier.]

not any more contentious, which cannot lead to any more serious situations nor to any worse difficulties than in the administration of public funds in this country.

Besides, having spoken of this accused person, who does not exist and who will never exist, and having said that this accused had no rights, the hon. member for Cardigan forgot to mention clause 32 of the bill and the amendment adopted by the committee, to which I refer the hon. member in case he has forgotten about it. I also refer all other hon. members to it, without reading it, because I want to be brief, as I consider that the work already done in committee should not be completely useless.

Unfortunately, the work of this committee becomes partly useless, because it seems that between consideration in committee and the report stage in the house, some opposition members forget everything that happened. So, the hon. member for Cardigan states that on the procedure under which the Commissioner will operate, he put questions to the ministers who were unable, in committee, to tell him why the procedure had been so conceived.

Once more, it is not the time to run through everything that was said in committee—because it would be to no avail to work in committee—I refer the hon. member to page 367, No. 5, of the Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Special Committee on the Official Languages Bill. He will find two full pages where my colleague the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) explained in detail to the hon. member for Cardigan, why the procedure is such as it is.

If the hon. member for Cardigan does not remember it, he could read the text over tonight before going to bed. I am sure that it will re-assure him and soothe his conscience since he told us earlier that it bothered him. He should then be able to sleep soundly. In fact, the answers given by my colleague the Minister of Justice are there, and I am surprised, once again, that the hon. member does not remember them. But I should not be surprised really since he does not seem to remember his own remarks to the committee.

Thus, carried away by indignation, he accused us, tonight of wanting to judge people behind closed doors. He made it an absolute crime. He allowed himself to be carried away to the point of telling us that everything should be carried out in public, whereas he said himself before the committee, and I refer to his remarks, on page 351, No. 4: