

Official Languages

Mr. Lewis: He is more interesting though, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dinsdale: Mr. Speaker, I was merely trying to clarify the interjection by the Minister of Justice in relation to a very important event that took place in Manitoba last week.

There is a very fundamental point I wish to bring to the attention of hon. members of this house with respect to the cultural rights of Canadians across the country. I refer, of course, to the basic rights of our first Canadians, the Indians and Eskimos. I refer to them at this time, Mr. Speaker, because a statement was made in the house within recent days to the effect that the Liberal Government in Ottawa intends to completely ignore their responsibilities in this respect. Over the relatively short period of five years, they are going to hand over to the provinces the responsibility for looking after the long neglected rights of the Indians. Bearing this in mind, I think the amendment before the house becomes all the more important. It provides the legislative authority for the government in Ottawa to encourage the natural development of any minority language, especially in so far as the use of such language relates to education at the provincial level. I believe this is perhaps the most telling argument I can use in urging the hon. members who support the government to vote for the amendment which would remove some of the more discriminatory aspects of the clause as it applies to other minorities in this country.

This is my final word on the matter at this stage. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has been criticizing the press for failing to get the message through to the people of Canada. I suppose this would be his explanation of what happened in Manitoba last week. Someone has said, I think with a good deal of wisdom, that it is not the medium that is at fault so far as government action is concerned, it is the message. I trust the message has been received loud and clear and that we will have the support of the Minister of Justice, the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) and all of their colleagues in removing this element of discrimination which is causing a growing feeling of alienation in western Canada and is leading to a protest that can only be compared to that which existed in the 1920's and 1930's.

Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I wish to deal with the amendment posed by the hon. member for Peace [The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard).]

River (Mr. Baldwin). As I read his amendment, it has two objects. The first is to provide a written guarantee in the statute that the natural development of any language other than an official language shall not be restrained or restricted. The hon. member uses the words "restrained" and "restricted". The second object of the amendment as I read it is to assist the provinces in encouraging natural development of any such minority language, that is to say any language other than English or French especially with regard to the use of such language in the matter of education.

From the tenure of the speeches of the hon. members for Peace River, Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski) and now the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale), the amendment is put forth in the belief, and this is the allegation of the hon. members who spoke, that minority groups in this country which are not of British or French origin feel that somehow they are being discriminated against by the provisions of the official languages bill.

This amendment is very similar in form and content to the one proposed before the special committee by the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Yewchuk). As hon. members know, at that time we dealt with it very thoroughly and the arguments relevant and pertaining to the amendment were discussed. In order to deal with it on the floor of the house, I have to repeat some of the words I addressed to the special committee.

When I was in western Canada negotiating with the western Attorneys-General, and on other occasions, I found great concern. I believe this concern is largely as a result of misunderstanding of what this bill is really about. There is great concern that the bill discriminates against those seven million or eight million people who are of neither English or French stock, and that this in effect sets up a type of second class citizenship. I said in committee, and it was expressed in far more eloquent terms before the special committee by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), that this bill in no way alters the relationship of citizenship in this country. As far as this government is concerned there is and always will be, and certainly this is not being altered by the bill itself, only one class of citizen in this country.

Those who have come to this country from other nations as immigrants have found themselves in a position where they have had to accept the facts as they exist. Those who