

*Official Languages*

bilingual districts, it would not be proper to infer that they are opposed to the principle of official bilingualism. I think that, on the contrary, if a poll were taken, it would be seen that the great majority are in favour of official bilingualism.

Mr. Speaker, I am rather surprised to note that a bill on official languages which answers an aspiration as basic as that of national unity as well as that of a group of people as large as the French-Canadian group, who want to live on an equal footing with English-speaking Canadians, should be the subject of so many precautions.

I am happy to note that, for the most part, my colleagues in this house are in favour of the principle of this bill. They have said so openly. However, although there is no direct objection to the principle, the discussion drags on and many precautions are taken, a great number of distinctions are made and an infinite number of constitutional concerns are put forward. And many subtle definitions, complaints and restrictions are made; in short, we are trying by all sorts of means to put so many buffers that, for all practical purposes, the bill finally becomes inoperative. No one dares attack it directly.

Some civil servants might suffer injustices on account of this legislation. Compulsion certainly exists since some people will have to learn French. In some quarters, some even say: You should not get carried away, you, the Quebec people; you are still the inhabitants of a conquered province. Since constitutional matters are added to that, let us settle them before we pass any legislation on official languages.

We are also told: Other ethnic groups are entitled to their own language. Large ethnic groups will have to be treated on the same footing as the French-speaking Canadians.

It is being said also: For all practical purposes, the Commissioner of Languages will become some kind of dictator in this field. All sorts of things are being said, Mr. Speaker, with an almost machiavellian subtlety which barely hides the desire to neutralize this bill.

Mr. Speaker, if somebody talks about injustice in the public service, I should like to remind those who are against this bill that French-speaking Canadians have been suffering injustice and discrimination for 200 years in the public service.

If anybody says that employees of the public service are compelled to learn French, I shall point out that for 200 years we have

[Mr. Mongrain.]

been compelled to learn English and we have learned it.

To those who remind us that we are a conquered nation, I say that this is an incident in an insignificant war and that no people endowed with a modicum of feelings and of pride will reconcile itself to centuries of subjection without sporadic outbursts, such as those which are happening at present in the province of Quebec and in the rest of this country, in order to obtain full equality with all other Canadians. In my opinion, this is not a serious argument; it is an insult to French-speaking Canadians.

● (5:10 p.m.)

To those who put forward the constitutional red tape, I say, Mr. Speaker, that men are not made to serve the law but that the law is made to serve men.

When it comes to fulfilling as basic a need as that concerning respect for a given language or religion, for instance, no constitutional red tape can ever be more important than this essential need, the existence of which must be urgently recognized.

Other ethnic groups also have rights, Mr. Speaker. We know that and we treat them well. We have welcomed them to Canada and given them all the rights enjoyed by Canadian people. When they came to this country, they knew they would have to choose between two official languages, French and English. They are allowed in addition to keep their own mother tongue in their schools, and no law prevents them from continuing to use it in their relations, with the members of their family or ethnic group.

Finally, all the other objections that are put forth are, to my mind, fictitious, and seem to have no other purpose but to confuse the issue, to throw dust in people's eyes and to keep the Canadian public from understanding well the reasons for this legislation.

A while ago I heard the member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) asking hon. members, in particular the French-speaking group, to be tolerant and to understand the aspirations of Canadians of foreign or English origin who live in Western Canada. For 200 years now, we, in Quebec, have set the example of respect for English-speaking citizens; we have given them their schools, we have heard them in their own tongue in our courts, in our municipal assemblies, in our provincial legislature.

We have proved our tolerance and what we want now is not tolerance but justice. We are