

Official Languages

circumstances. I appeal to the government to reconsider this provision. There is time for it to give consideration to the amendment this party has moved. If accepted, the amendment will bring about two results. It will preserve the rights of an individual who may possibly be affected by the report of the commissioner and, at the same time, preserve the efficiency of the commissioner himself. By accepting our amendment the government would go a long way towards removing the fears and suspicions which, as some eloquent speakers in this chamber have pointed out, this bill has created. Those fears and suspicions could be removed without in any way impairing the effectiveness of the commissioner who has important functions under this extremely important bill.

[Translation]

Hon. Gérard Pelletier (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, at this point of the debate, I feel certain things must be said.

I do not wish to refer, to be sure, to the amendment just moved by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), since there is another amendment before us, and it is the one, of course, I wanted to deal with since the beginning of the evening.

The amendment moved by the hon. member for Cardigan (Mr. McQuaid) has led to two interventions which, in my opinion, are of unequal value.

I will first refer most briefly to the second, by the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams). All those who heard it will understand my lack of interest in the ideas it expressed, since precisely they were few.

Besides, the hon. member for Calgary North has a remarkable characteristic, and I have always found him interesting in that his voice becomes all the louder as his mind becomes weaker. Now since his resonant voice was heard tonight, there is no further need for me to say what I think of what he said.

I looked for a really strong argument in the contribution of the hon. member for Calgary North and found that I was totally wasting my time. He made a number of emotional appeals which have nothing to do with the realities of the bill, and when he suddenly attempted to present an argument, on one of the rare occasions during his speech when he tried to think things out, it was entirely besides the point. Indeed he then used the terminology of criminal courts and he dealt with the Commissioner of Languages as if he

were an examining magistrate, a chief of police and a presiding judge all at once, three figures to whom the Commissioner bears no resemblance whatsoever.

That is why my remarks will rather deal with the speech of the hon. member for Cardigan (Mr. McQuaid). He also, quite to my surprise, spoke on a highly emotional tone. It is all the more amazing as it does not happen very often. I was under the impression that he managed to convince himself that we were studying a piece of legislation likely to encroach on, or lead to encroachment on all civic liberties, on all human freedoms, without any exception.

He first quoted, giving the impression that this was the most scandalous thing, that part in the act where it is said that any investigations the Commissioner of Official Languages has a right to conduct will be held behind closed doors.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, if the investigation had to do with a criminal case, perhaps—and not only perhaps, but certainly—all the words spoken by the hon. member for Cardigan would take their full meaning.

But since it is not the investigation of a criminal case, but strictly and only a matter for the Official Languages Commissioner to get information himself in order to report to parliament, the situation is entirely different. Therefore, it is perfectly normal that the legislator should be careful in making the procedure easier and in avoiding for the commissioner the procedures to which the regular courts are subjected to because the commissioner—I point it out once more, and not for the last time, is not asked to render justice. All he has to do is to find out facts and report to parliament.

In another argument, the hon. member for Cardigan said here again shouting scandal, that before the special committee which studied the bill, I myself had defined the function of the Commissioner and that in reply to a question, I had said that, in my opinion, his role was to make sure the law was enforced.

Armed with this quotation, which is accurate, the hon. member for Cardigan attempted to prove that the Commissioner was becoming a chief of police since he enforced the law. But as always, when a quotation is incomplete, there is the risk of misquoting, that is, of distorting the views of the person quoted.

Now this is exactly what happened. Because, I was explaining, of course to the special committee, after questions had been