

*Official Languages*

the many measures needed to keep Canada united, they are prepared to go along with it.

I point out that there has been a great deal of criticism of the official languages bill from many sections of Canada, especially from the western provinces and the Atlantic provinces. In most cases I feel that this criticism has stemmed mainly from a misunderstanding of the purposes of the legislation. Much of it is due to the lack of a clear and concise explanation by the government of several clauses which certainly need clarification. It was quite obvious from the start—I could go back to last fall—that there was great public concern as to how the administration of the legislation would affect the civil service, the general public and all the provincial administrations. I believe that much of the current unrest and dissatisfaction in Canada could have been headed off by the government if prompt and clearcut explanations had been given months ago.

The official languages bill does not really grant any new, fundamental right which is not already granted by previous acts. I think we must make this point very clear. It does set out more specifically just what language rights the two founding races of Canada envisioned over 100 years ago. Clarification of those historic rights granted to both our founding races by the British North America Act of 1867 is clearly needed in 1969. Apparently these historic rights have somehow been overlooked in the teaching of history in our educational institutions.

● (3:00 p.m.)

I believe these rights must be respected, honoured and preserved by those of us who today are reviewing the decisions made by the Fathers of Confederation over 100 years ago in respect of the language rights of the founding races. I shall read section 133 of the British North America Act because I think it should go into the record. It is not too entertaining but I think I should quote it. In section 133 of the B.N.A. Act of 1867, I repeat, the intent of the current bill is clearly set out. The section reads as follows:

Either the English or the French language may be used by any person in the debates of the Houses of the Parliament of Canada and of the Houses of the Legislature of Quebec; and both those languages shall be used in the respective records and journals of those Houses; and either of those languages may be used by any person or in any pleading or process in or issuing from any court of Canada established under this act, and in or from all or any of the courts of Quebec. The acts of the parliament of Canada and of the legislature of Quebec shall be printed and published in both those languages.

[Mr. Harding.]

I think that language is very clear. It does not go into the fine details, which we do not expect to find in legislation of this type, but so far as I am concerned its intent is crystal clear. I view the current bill as merely setting out the above section in more detail. It gives equality to the two official languages of Canada insofar as the federal jurisdiction is concerned. There is nothing wrong with that. This was and is one of the foundation stones of Canadian unity. The bill indicates that both the official languages will be recognized and used by the federal government service in communicating and dealing with the general public. Every citizen will have the opportunity to communicate with the federal government in either of the two official languages. This, in effect, is the principle of equality of the two official languages as outlined in the B.N.A. Act.

The present legislation in no way forces English speaking persons to learn French, nor does it force French speaking persons to learn English. As I understand it, its bilingual aspect does not apply to the whole of the federal government service, and this has been indicated to us by several ministers who have spoken in the debate. It cannot force any of the provinces to teach French in their educational institutions. This matter is entirely up to the provinces and must be negotiated with them, although the federal government has indicated that it will assist financially any province that proceeds with additional French instruction.

I found in talking to people, many of them in western Canada, that there is a feeling among some sections of our Canadian society that the official languages bill will protect only those whose mother tongue is French. This is basically not a fact, for we find that in the province of Quebec alone there are well over one million persons who consider English as their official language. We must remember that the language rights of this group are also being protected in those areas which are predominantly French speaking, and we in this house must never forget this fact. One group is getting protection in one section of Canada, and other groups are getting protection in other sections.

As I said previously, I have found in the past two years that one of the most important issues in this country is Canadian unity, and let no member of this house dodge that issue. I have talked to individuals who are very much opposed to the principles outlined in the official languages bill, but when the chips are down, if it means strengthening Canadian