

Official Languages

the principle of the bill and the other way is to remove the principle from the bill. I suggest that is what is being done here.

Mr. Horner: You give me too much credit.

Mr. Brewin: No, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member was doing a good job. I believe the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner)—and I respect his right to have this view—is one of those who voted against the bill on second reading. I believe this amendment is very sweeping. It reads:

Notwithstanding anything in this Act, no person shall be refused employment or promotion within the Public Service of Canada on grounds alone of inadequate acquaintance with either of the official languages mentioned in this Act, provided that the applicant has declared his intention and willingness to learn the other official language.

There must be very many occasions on which the knowledge of one or the other of the official languages is absolutely essential to the performance of a function, and therefore I do not believe it would be appropriate to say that no person shall be refused employment or promotion because of his inadequate acquaintance with either of the official languages. It seems to me this would be carrying the thing very far.

I am sure there are situations in the public service where it is essential that someone know both official languages and not just one because he would be unable to handle the job without that particular knowledge. This bill is full of safeguards. Clause 40 contains many of these safeguards, such as the postponement of early application and matters of that sort, which would be difficult to bring about and which would prejudice the interests of the public. If this amendment should pass, all a person would have to do to make the act completely dead would be to declare his intention and willingness to learn the official language. I have declared my intention and willingness to learn the other official language, although I must say I am finding the actual task of doing so considerably more difficult than my expression of intention to do so. I would not hesitate to say there are many jobs in the public service to which it would be totally wrong to appoint a person with my inadequate acquaintance with one of the official languages. Yet, this amendment says that notwithstanding anything in this act, no person shall be refused employment or promotion within the Public Service of Canada on grounds alone of inadequate acquaintance with either of the official languages mentioned in this act, provided that the applicant

[Mr. Brewin.]

has declared his intention and willingness to learn the other official language.

• (5:50 p.m.)

All a person need do is make that declaration. As I say, I believe the bill contains many safeguards which would protect persons from being wrongfully dismissed in cases where a knowledge of the two languages is not essential. Subsection (4) of Section 40 of the act provides for the maintenance of the principle of selection of personnel according to merit. This is required by the Public Service Employment Act and that basic principle is preserved.

This measure will have to be worked out in a reasonable manner so as not to deprive people of the right to effective maintenance of this principle of the act. The hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) spoke of the fears of many people in the west. I can understand why there would be such fears, but I think it is the task of those of us in this house to diminish any fears there may be.

Mr. Horner: Diminish them by our actions.

Mr. Brewin: Yes, that is right, diminish them by our actions. That does not mean we should adopt amendments that would destroy the effective working of the act, and for this reason we are opposed to the amendment.

Mr. Horner: You are nit-picking.

[*Translation*]

Mr. C.-A. Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I shall say only a few words on the amendment that has just been presented by the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner). While I listened to the hon. member making his point, and since he had already said he was against the principle of the bill, I find his amendment is logical, because he has confirmed—

[*English*]

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member suggests that I stated in this house I was against the principle of this bill. I do not recall ever stating that. I said the legislation was poor.

An hon. Member: You voted against it.

Mr. Horner: I voted against it on second reading because I wanted the committee to change it during committee consideration.

Mr. Deachman: Are you opposed to the principle of the bill?