

Official Languages

result in a further lack of communication between the various parts of Canada, although the need for effective communication has never been greater. I am familiar with the situation in western Canada. Westerners believe the cabinet is responsible for a failure of communication in connection with the serious agricultural situation there. I do not propose to drag the subject of agriculture into this debate, but I think it can be used for the purpose of drawing an analogy. If the bill before us now is passed in its present form without provision being made for proper representation on the board we are asking for trouble over this issue just as we are asking for trouble, and do have trouble, with regard to agriculture.

I accept the principle of this bill in its entirety. Hon. members who are supporting the amendment are merely asking that there be true representation on the advisory board. I do not think this is asking too much. I was disappointed to hear the minister suggest that what was done in the committee would dictate the procedure at the report stage in the house. I may say I took exception to the small size of the special committee which studied this legislation. My personal view is that a committee as small in numbers as the one which studied this bill could not really be representative. I was also disappointed to find that the government had asked many younger Members of Parliament, people for whom I have the highest regard, to serve on this committee, because I realized that the dictation comes from the front bench. Those people should stand on their own feet.

[Translation]

Mr. Corbin: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite has just said, in substance, that we younger government members receive instructions and even orders from the government or from the minister.

I wish to go on record as disputing the validity of this statement and I will even say that I personally presented an amendment quite out of line with the views of my government, which proves my ability to do my own thinking and to stand on my own feet.

[English]

Mr. Skoberg: The hon. member is to be congratulated if he did propose such an amendment, but during the time I have been attending committee meetings I have seen too much evidence that members on the government side change their minds after decisions

have been made. In this regard I need only refer to what happened in the committee on Transport and Communications. The evidence speaks for itself. I cast no reflection on individual members serving on committees but I believe that if this legislation is the most important which the government has to offer—and it seems that it is—hon. gentlemen opposite should have had their top cabinet men on that committee, giving direct expression to their views.

The west is vitally concerned, Mr. Speaker, about its representation both in Ottawa and elsewhere. The west is vitally concerned about the degree of recognition accorded it by eastern and central Canada in particular. Things are going on which make the west highly suspicious of anything the government does. I do not necessarily believe that any member of the cabinet would deliberately bypass issues affecting western Canada but in today's situation it is very important that every board, every committee and every advisory body set up by the government should be truly representative of the entire nation. If hon. members opposite are prepared to invite separatism they can certainly do it by refusing representation to the west on an advisory board such as the one the government is proposing to set up at the present time.

We recognize that the board will have considerable power. We recognize also that the commissioner to be appointed will have considerable power. The government has, I realize, written safeguards into the bill, but I think it is of great importance that the commissioner should be familiar with the situation in every province of this nation. Let us avoid a situation developing in which the west can say, once again: We told you so.

• (5:00 p.m.)

It is easy for me to address public meetings in my constituency and support the principle of the language bill, and this I do at every opportunity. But it is very difficult to convince the people in the west that their wishes are being taken into account. I urge the government to consider the points I have made and to ensure that the commissioner is fully familiar with the wishes of the entire nation, not just one particular segment of the country.

If we are to bridge the communication gap, I suggest, that the only way to do so is to adopt the amendment that is before the house at this time. I believe that the entire nation, but certainly the people in the west,