

Official Languages

the failure of the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) to inform members of the house whether any amendments are to be proposed to the bill, whether, if there are such amendments, they will be major or minor and what parts of the bill they will affect. The fact is that we are debating a bill without knowing the precise nature of it. I am sure the Secretary of State would reply by saying we are debating at this stage only the principle of the bill. I say to him that that is sheer, shabby semantics, because the principle of the bill can easily be affected by changes made to it. There are doubts and fears across Canada about the way in which this bill may be implemented. If amendments are to be proposed which might serve to lessen those fears, the principle of the bill would be very desirably and seriously affected.

It seems to me it is an immense discourtesy on the part of the government to act with such insolence at this stage of the bill. I say to the government that it is worse than that. If the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the members of the government are as serious and sincere as they profess about the importance of this bill and, if I may say so, as I am about its importance, it was their duty to introduce the bill in such a way as to create a pleasant and co-operative atmosphere instead of immediately arousing resentment. You do not deal with this kind of delicate subject, which requires a great deal of understanding and tact, in a tactless way. This is precisely what we have seen happen today. I can only reach the conclusion that members of the cabinet have not yet agreed about what amendments, if any, there should be; they are still arguing about it.

Since every one of us expected the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) to introduce the bill rather than some other minister, I can only conclude that the Minister of Justice has been in some way demoted and someone else has been put in his place. It was the Minister of Justice who travelled across the country meeting the representatives of provincial governments. It was from him that we expected to hear the results of those conversations. Instead, we had a very charming lecture from a long-time friend whom I like and admire, the Secretary of State, who told us as much about the bill as any commentator has written about it in the last six months. Instead of explaining what is involved and telling us what amendments will be proposed, instead of indicating the way in which the act will be administered, instead of telling the Canadian

people what the commissioner will actually be asked to do, instead of dealing with these matters that concern the people of Canada, the Secretary of State gave us a very interesting, pleasant and charming speech that I suggest advanced this debate not one iota.

Please believe me, Mr. Speaker; I say this not for the purpose of political needling but precisely because I am passionately in favour of the principle of bilingualism in Canada. The government, instead of introducing this matter in a way which would win widespread support and sympathy, has immediately fumbled the ball and introduced it in the most outrageous way. I understand that the Prime Minister has engagements elsewhere in the country. He drafted this bill and I would have thought he would be interested enough to make sure he was here on the day it was discussed by parliament so that he would be able to guide his cabinet and the commissioner in future in light of the debate on the bill.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sure the hon. member does not want to leave the impression that the Prime Minister was not here when the bill was introduced this morning. He was right in the chamber. The hon. member knows that full well.

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I will now make my point very clear because I believe it is of importance. I am, of course, aware that he was here when the bill was introduced. I am aware that he was here while the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) spoke. I am not sure whether I saw him here when the Secretary of State spoke.

Mr. Hees: He was here for just part of the speech.

Mr. Lewis: It may be the other way around. Whatever it is, if this measure is as important as he claims it to be, he is in charge of the program of parliament and if he had to be away today, which obviously he did—I do not begrudge him that or criticize him for it—it was within his power to make sure that the bill was introduced on a day when he could be in the chamber to listen to the discussion. I do not think it helps this delicate matter, this basically important matter, to treat it in this cavalier way, with the Prime Minister not here when the debate takes place, with the minister who introduced the bill not telling us what amendments, if any, are to be proposed, thus defying parliament and the people of Canada. One does not have to be a person with the experience in