

Official Languages

brought up the point that we should be dealing with bills that relate to economic conditions and that a bill of this nature which deals with language rights is not the only answer to regional grievances. The government of Canada has never disputed that. That is why I say a strawman is being set up to knock down. The speeches made by the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) during the debate on the bill to establish his department made that very point.

● (3:40 p.m.)

The point has repeatedly been made by the Prime Minister that we do not satisfy people in the west or in the maritimes or in Quebec by passing measures that point only in one direction, such as extending language rights in a certain area of Quebec. This point has been emphasized also by the leaders of other parties. The government has tried to do something about this question and it will continue to try. I think this should be made clear and members should understand it.

In conclusion, I urge the rapid adoption of second reading of this bill so that it may be sent to the special committee where it will receive more detailed scrutiny. I think the bill is extremely important for the English-speaking minorities in Quebec and the French-speaking minorities outside Quebec. I think the people of Canada gave this government a strong mandate to put this measure through, since it was one of the leading planks in the Liberal party platform during the election campaign last June. For the first time the people of Canada returned a majority government because they felt the unity of the country was threatened and that the policies put forward by the Prime Minister would bring about unity. Thus, I feel the government has been given a strong mandate to put forward this kind of measure.

However, let me also make it clear that I do not feel this bill is a full and complete answer. I fully support the initiatives of the Prime Minister in trying to entrench the bill of rights in the constitution of the country, a bill of rights that will contain guarantees in regard to the French and English languages. The bill before the house today deals only with bilingualism in institutions within the jurisdiction of the federal government.

Many injustices with regard to language rights—such as the injustice to which I referred at St. Leonard, Quebec—fall within

[Mr. Allmand.]

provincial jurisdiction. School rights and education rights have to be protected by provincial legislation of a kind similar to this legislation. However, I think it would be even better to put these rights beyond the ordinary legislative competence of the federal parliament or the provincial legislatures by entrenching a bill of rights in our constitution, one which would protect language rights, as suggested by the royal commission on bilingualism and biculturalism. If that were the case, no extremist provincial or federal government that wished to crush these rights would be able to do so. I feel that this is really what is required.

I urge rapid passage of the bill so that it can be sent to the committee, and I urge all hon. members to support the bill.

Mr. Aiken: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member now permit the question I wanted to ask him?

Mr. Allmand: Yes.

Mr. Aiken: The hon. member rather brushed off the amendments to be proposed by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner). Can he tell us whether these amendments that are being proposed will be fundamental to the bill, or minor?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, I am not a member of the cabinet and I do not know what the amendments are. However, my point is that the Secretary of State is the minister responsible for this bill. On second reading we deal with the principle of a bill, not its details. I doubt whether the amendments would deal with the basic fundamentals in the bill. The government is committed to the principles contained in the bill. I can only speculate that the amendments deal with matters that are not basic to the bill. As the hon. member knows, detailed amendments, if they are announced—and I suppose they will be announced by the Minister of Justice on Tuesday—will have to be moved in the committee and dealt with there; they cannot be dealt with in the house. However, as I say, as a backbencher I do not know what the exact nature of the amendments will be.

Mr. Jack McIntosh (Swift Current-Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, I had intended to make some preliminary points prior to getting on to my main criticisms of the bill, but since I have little more than ten minutes before the