

Official Languages

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I am saying to the hon. member for Crowfoot, through Your Honour, that his amendment does not achieve that objective. His amendment would render null and void the purposes of the official languages bill. The policy that he is trying to achieve I believe the government is trying to achieve by ensuring that the public service of Canada is made equally accessible both to French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians across the country. We do not want to force bilingualism on any citizen of this country. What we want is an institutional bilingualism that is achieved with fairness to those men and women who have been recruited to the public service of Canada. The legislative straitjacket which the hon. member is attempting to force on the government would not achieve what the hon. member wants to achieve but would indeed deny the principle of this bill.

For these reasons the government recommends to the house that it rejects this amendment.

Mr. Horner: Now the minister has concluded, would he permit a question?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Crowfoot on a question.

Mr. Horner: I will direct my question to the minister in this way. Let me assume his point is valid. If he finds fault with the wording of the amendment, would he ask his legal draftsmen to use their ability to bring in an amendment that will substantiate the point made by the amendment, which the minister has said is a valid one?

My second question is this: The minister says that all civil servants who so desire will be given ample opportunity to learn the second language, be it English or French. Are we now led to believe that every member of the public service will, in the future, have an opportunity to learn the other language? Will everyone in the 9,000 areas that the minister said will be set up be given an opportunity to learn the other language?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, in answer to the hon. member's first question no amount of skilful drafting—and I do not think we could improve upon the drafting of the hon. member for Crowfoot—could convert an inadequate acquaintance with either of the official languages and a willingness to learn into an objective standard that would enable this bill to achieve this purpose. This must depend on flexibility and on justice of

[Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton).]

administration. That is the answer to the hon. member's first question. I could bring all the forces of the law officers of the Crown to bear on this particular amendment and none of them could achieve what the hon. member is attempting to achieve.

In answer to the second question if, as I have said, the bilingual capability really relates to 25,000 public servants—

Mr. Horner: You said one sixth.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Yes, one sixth. But 25,000 are, in the opinion of the commission, fully bilingual, so we are dealing with one twelfth—one half of one sixth.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I have to watch the minister's arithmetic. One sixth of 370,000 is 60,000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the minister to direct his remarks to the Chair, and I invite the hon. member for Crowfoot to hear the minister out.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I accept your reprimand, Mr. Speaker, but the hon. member for Crowfoot is a pretty magnetic personality and sometimes I get carried away by him. I suggest that if the hon. member for Crowfoot and I were sitting on the fence watching cattle go through the gate, he would have no trouble with his mathematics. At the moment we are dealing with one twelfth of the public servants of Canada, 25,000, for whom a capability of 9,000 places will be available. As a result of the advice given to me by the chairman of the public service commission. I am convinced that our facilities will be adequate to achieve the desired result. They are my two answers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I support the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner) since it is the only apparent hope of making undesirable legislation at least tolerable. I would have preferred to see this bill withdrawn and redrafted or, failing this measure of good sense, at least held in abeyance until the question of its constitutionality was cleared up and the effects of its provisions more closely studied. But as things now stand, it is clear the government intends to push it through parliament, heedless of probable consequences. In these circumstances, the best we can hope for is to mitigate some of the injustices it will obviously create.

Like other members of my party who support this amendment, I am chiefly concerned