

Official Languages

in any way whatsoever that this precludes a full debate here in the House of Commons.

The hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) interpreted my words quite correctly. If full scope is to be given to the committee system, some credence must be given to the decisions of the committee. Where a full inquiry has been made by a special and standing committee of the House of Commons, I believe that the house itself ought to pay due regard to it.

I want to restate, if I may in this full house assembled—I am delighted that the hon. member for Calgary North has returned to the house—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): —from where he absented himself for a few minutes, as we all must from time to time because of other engagements. The hon. member will know exactly of what I speak. I think there is a misunderstanding, and I want to pay tribute to my colleague, the hon. Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier) who set it forth.

An hon. Member: You missed his speech too.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): No, I was here for his speech. He set this misunderstanding forth in a clear fashion just a few minutes before the hon. member for Temiscamingue (Mr. Caouette) spoke. There is a misunderstanding about the powers and the purpose of the official languages commissioner.

Mr. Nesbitt: Some of us can still read.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Some of us can still read, but some of us can still perhaps not understand fully the words we are trying to digest, and I say that with the greatest respect to the hon. member.

Mr. Nesbitt: Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): The official commissioner is not a court; he is not a party to a judicial inquiry; he is not a judicial tribunal; he is not a quasi-judicial tribunal; he is an investigator in purely an administrative fashion. He has not the power to assess rights; he has no power to assess obligations; he has no power to impose penalties; he has no power to assess guilt and he has no power to implement any of the sanctions of the Criminal law. He simply recommends. He reports only to parliament, and the only sanction in this bill is persuasion and public opinion.

There is no sanction against any individual whatsoever and no individual rights are assessed. This is the purpose of this bill.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Brewin: May I ask the minister a question?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Well, why not?

Mr. Brewin: It is perfectly true, as the minister has said, that this is not a court or a judicial tribunal, but I ask the minister whether he will agree that when there is power to make a report which might seriously affect the reputation of individuals dealt with in the report, should this not be a power in respect of which the individual has a right to ask only to be exercised after a public hearing?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I will deal with that in a minute, but I will say it might be that reputations could be indirectly affected. This is why the government has opted for private hearings so that individual rights are assessed—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): —so that the individual situation is assessed in order that reputations will not be affected, and I will get to that position in a moment.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): The report is to be public.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): We discussed this rather thoroughly at the committee stage, and the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) knows of what I speak. I will deal with the point quite thoroughly before I take my seat.

Mr. Woolliams: Would the minister permit one question?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Yes.

Mr. Woolliams: The minister has said, if I understood his remarks correctly, that the commissioner would not be a member of a court of law or have those powers. I would ask the minister why this commissioner has the right to summons and enforce the attendance of witnesses, which is true of any court; compel them to give oral or written evidence on oath, which is true of most courts; to produce documents, which is true of most courts, and to use the same kind of evidence that is used