

Official Languages

Some of my colleagues who are sympathetic toward it may well support it. It is not the kind of amendment on which the principle of the bill rests. I cannot support it for the two reasons I have given. First, it is rigid. It is wrong for federal institutions to be rigidly representative of geographic areas when they ought to be flexibly representative of the quality of the people of the country, as that quality is related to the purposes of this act. Second, I believe there are areas which ought to be represented by more than one member so that minorities as well as majorities can be represented in the province in question. Also, there are minority groups in this country which need to be represented on this board much more urgently than every one of a group of provinces displaying similar histories and similar attitudes on the part of their peoples.

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, we are now considering an amendment put forward by the hon. member for Cardigan (Mr. McQuaid), to amend clause 14 of the official languages bill, as reported to the house by the special committee on the official languages bill.

This amendment concerns membership on a certain Bilingual Districts Advisory Board. To place the discussion in its proper context, I will recall that clause 14 of the bill, as brought back before the house by the special committee on the official languages bill, a group which, incidentally, deserves to be congratulated on its efficient work, a good demonstration of the importance of national unity at this time provides for the appointment of five to six commissioners.

The number is not specified. The text reads, in part, as follows:

—not less than five and not more than ten persons, selected as nearly as may be as being representative of residents of the several provinces or principal regions of Canada, as commissioners to constitute a Bilingual Districts Advisory Board—

Now the honourable member for Cardigan has probably noticed that Canada includes not a certain number, but a definite number of provinces. He also noted that the census in Canada does not cover merely a few, but all provinces.

He probably felt—I imagine these were his motives—that the question of establishing bilingual districts was of concern to the whole nation and should not merely arouse the interest, but also require the participation of

[Mr. Lewis.]

every Canadian province in this great undertaking of bilingualism throughout Canada, under the official languages bill. Consequently, he proposes to make a slight change in clause 14, to make it a bit more specific, which reads as follows:

● (4:00 p.m.)

—appoint not less than twelve persons, being representatives of residents of several provinces, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, ... to constitute a Bilingual Districts Advisory Board—

I heard the remarks of the mover of this motion, as well as those of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) and, to my mind, their arguments were very weak.

From the parliamentary point of view and in the spirit of the official languages bill, I feel that the reply of the Minister of Justice—even though he did excellent work as well as the Secretary of State (Mr. Pelletier)—was unsatisfactory and weak in the face of the argument set forth by the member for Cardigan.

Let us say that I was more in favour of the motion of the member. After having heard the member for York South (Mr. Lewis), I no longer have any doubts; I am completely in favour of the amendment and hope the majority of my colleagues are also. The argument of the member for York South—who is bent on opposing the amendment—is weaker than that of the minister. In addition, the reasoning of the member for York South is wily and does not follow either the spirit or the letter of the amendment of the member for Cardigan.

I want to restore the debate in its true context, briefly. We must not fall into sentimentality. There has been too much of it with regard to confederation, bilingualism and Canada. That is why we are so far behind in solving the problem of national unity. It is time to come back to earth in order to build a great Canada where everyone's interests will be respected.

It is precisely in this perspective of respect for individual interests that I speak in this manner because, in short, the confederation is composed of different provinces which are rather different one from another geographically, culturally, psychologically and traditionally.

Therefore, the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Cardigan is more in accordance with the image of Canada as it should be and as we all want it to be. Clause 14 of the bill seems to grant the governor in council a power which I would term discretionary in some fields.