

*Official Languages*

He will simply see to it that the legislation is enforced. If someone feels that his rights have been denied, he will be able to submit his case to the Commissioner who will then report to the government, to parliament.

In that respect, I think that the bill is clear enough and I wonder whether the Progressive Conservative members do not present amendments just to confuse people further.

Earlier, I heard the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams), mixing up everything, the bill with the absence of the ministers, and the vote Friday last when the bell rang for 40 minutes. However, the same hon. member forgot to mention that when the vote was taken, about half of the Progressive Conservative members sneaked away so as not to vote. There is something inconsistent about that. They say that they are in favour of the bill but they introduce all kinds of amendments as if they really opposed it. All sorts of charges or innuendos are spread to the effect that the French-Canadians want to oblige all English-speaking people to speak French, which is not the case at all.

And I shall give an example. When the official languages bill is implemented, it will not mean that everybody will have to learn both languages. Shall I say to my father who is 81 years old: Tomorrow morning because the languages bill has been adopted, you will start learning English. Since he has never spoken a word of English in his life, I think it would be madness.

It is the same thing as far as the other language is concerned. The bill does not compel the people to learn the other official language and the amendment now under study is simple. The law says that if somebody feels he has been wronged, he will make a report to the Commissioner who does not judge the situation but makes a report to parliament. This is where the decisions are made to ensure that both languages shall be respected according to the spirit of the law. The matter seems simple to me.

In the house, some members say they are in favour of both languages, but they move amendments which spread confusion.

If the amendment improved the bill, all right, but it does not improve it. It even says that the accused will have to resort to the Commissioner who will decide, in private, or in public hearings, what should be done in the circumstances. Such is not the duty of the Commissioner.

We are asking for something else. The bill provides for hearings held in private. Indeed

[Mr. Caouette.]

many people will refuse to air their grievances in public. Others, for political reasons perhaps, will want to bring up everything in the open, in order to cause even more confusion and division. But if everything is settled elsewhere and reported to parliament, the house could always discuss special cases or cases which cannot come before the Commissioner. The present government can take steps to that end. The next government will also be able to take action and assume its responsibilities in that field.

I sincerely believe, that as the Secretary of State just said, that the Commissioner will not act as a chief of police, as an examining magistrate, or as a judge on the bench, and that no accused will appear before him. It will actually be people who will want to state their case but they will not be accused, they will state their case, and the Commissioner will consider it. He will be absolutely free to gather information from other people and when he submits his report, we will know, at least, what steps he has taken, and whether there has been any injustice. It will always be possible then for us to take action.

I do not feel this bill is a strait jacket for anybody whatsoever. I therefore wonder why the Conservatives move such an amendment, which is only likely to create more confusion and make us wonder whether they are really in favour of the two official languages.

They say here in the house that they are in favour of it and then they criticize the bill and make every effort to prevent the recognition of the two official languages in Canada. There is no question of forcing people to learn both languages or either of them; everyone is free. Then, let the Commissioner act according to the spirit of the act.

It seems to me that we have nothing to say or to add about that. We are against that amendment to the official languages bill, in Canada.

• (9:20 p.m.)

[English]

**Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Justice):** Mr. Speaker, because of a previous engagement which I could not break I was unable to be here earlier this evening, but I have had reported to me the rather emotional speeches of certain hon. members, particularly the speech of the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams). I want to say again that this issue of the powers of the official languages commissioner was thoroughly examined before the special committee. I do not assert