

Official Languages

mainly with language matters for one group of people. Because of the diversity of our people and our customs, and because of the many different circumstances in which each minority group across this country lives, we cannot be positive that even the bill as proposed to be amended will meet the intended purpose.

This bill attempts to deal with longstanding grievances of one specific and large group of Canadians. There is no use in my standing here and saying these grievances are imaginary or that a better way can be found if we wait a while. No doubt a better way will be found, and perhaps another government will find it. There is no use in saying that many other grievances are not covered or that many other groups have been overlooked or ignored. Another government will correct these difficulties and there are more grievances which must be dealt with soon, but we must apparently wait for that day. The government has moved in a very narrow way to solve a very narrow grievance.

Other speakers have pointed out the great problems in many areas in respect of social welfare and civil rights. I do not need to go over them again because they have been well covered. We feel that the government is avoiding these issues and that it is bringing forward other bills perhaps as an excuse for its failure to meet the real problems of poverty and regional disparity.

In spite of all these things we cannot deny that in respect of this specific problem the government is moving, perhaps poorly and weakly, to rectify it. To this extent I feel bound to support the government with the hope that the committee will rectify some of the errors in the bill with the hope that this first move will precipitate others and will encourage further useful legislation to solve some of the problems facing this country. As I said at the outset, I feel bound to support the principle of this bill, and I will vote in favour of it on second reading.

[*Translation*]

Mr. E. B. Osler (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would be most pleased to speak only in French on this bill, but unfortunately it is impossible for me to do so right now, because I do not know the language well enough yet. I will continue my speech in English.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Aiken) referred at the beginning of

[Mr. Aiken.]

his remarks to events that are happening in other parts of the world and the fact that the same things could happen here. I agree with him completely that if they did the results might be similar. However, this is one of the things this bill respecting the status of official languages in Canada attempts to prevent.

I crave the indulgence of the house while I make a brief survey of some Canadian historical facts as I believe they relate to this bill. In doing so I hope I will allay some of the fears, pointed out by the hon. member who preceded me, in relation to the circumstances of the so-called other ethnic groups.

More than 350 years ago there were Canadians living in North America. Their language was French. More than 230 years ago Canadians were engaged in the exploration and exploitation of the west. Their language too was French. Almost 210 years ago French troops fighting in North America lost a battle to English troops, due chiefly to the superiority of the Royal Navy, and Canadians already settled here for more than a century and a half became colonial wards of Britannia in place of Marianne.

Some years later English speaking people, again because of the fortunes of war, began to settle in Canada, chiefly to the east and to the west of the ancient Canadian heartland along the banks of the St. Lawrence. It was not for another 60 years that my own ancestors arrived here from the British Isles, and not for another 30 years did the event known as Confederation take place.

At the time of Confederation both English and French, the mother tongues of the two great immigrant peoples living in British North America at that time, were given equal status in the federal parliament, in the federal courts, and in the legislative assembly and courts of the new province of Quebec. Three years later, when Louis Riel brought Manitoba into Confederation, both French and English were given official status under section 23 of the Manitoba Act which said that either English or French may be used by any person in the debates of the houses of legislature, and that both languages shall be used in the records and journals of those houses. It also said that either language may be used by any person in any pleading or process in any court of Canada established under the British North America Act, or in any court in the province. So clearly the right of the Canadian government to deal with the matter of languages as it would apply to a new territory was there, and it certainly was not challenged at the time.