

Official Languages

bill will be administered, concern regarding the reluctance of the government to be frank and open with what it proposes to do, what it proposes to suggest to the committee, and concern regarding the lack of firm and satisfactory assurances about the way in which the bill will be administered. Many misunderstandings exist about the bill. I believe many Canadians have the idea that the effect of the bill will be to compel them to learn both languages, French and English. Again I shall be getting on ground on which I do not like to tread, but I must ask why the Prime Minister has not gone across the country, particularly to those parts of the country where there is the deepest concern, and explained the bill. I know my hon. friend the Secretary of State has gone across the country but—and this is in no way personal—I think this is a task which should have been accepted by the Prime Minister. I know the Secretary of State is a very stable man but I do not believe his talents lie in the direction of quieting fears or assuaging doubts concerning the purposes of this bill.

I sincerely suggest it is the first duty of the Prime Minister who is sponsoring the bill, which I accept as put forward to further national unity, to make certain that any bill relating to national unity is fully understood throughout the country. I suggest that very little effort has really been made to ensure that the people of the country understand what this bill is about and that very little effort has really been made to remove the misapprehensions concerning what the bill will do. It is very important that the bill not be launched in an atmosphere of apprehension and concern in many parts of the country.

This bill, after all, is perhaps a small part of the total process of strengthening the bonds of union within Canada. There is the major question of constitutional reform on which there has been much discussion but very little progress to date. Progress on constitutional reform can be made more difficult if any unnecessary misapprehensions are created in the course of the progress of this bill. I say it is very urgent in terms of national unity generally and very urgent in terms of the future progress of constitutional discussions that the fears which exist regarding the administration of this bill be removed by the Prime Minister and his associates who are sponsoring the bill. A very determined effort should have been made long since to explain the bill in great detail to the people of this

country in order to remove the misapprehensions which we all know are in fact widespread. It is important to have these assurances and explanations. It is also important, of course, that there be full co-operation and consultation with the provinces. This is essential in any event, of course, if the concept behind the bill is to be really effective and meaningful.

Doubts have been expressed about the constitutionality of the bill. The Minister of Justice reports that his law officers have advised him there really is no question about its constitutionality. He did hold some discussions and is proposing some amendments which may remove some of the constitutional doubts which were raised by the representatives of some of the provinces at the federal-provincial conference. I recognize the position being taken by the Minister of Justice. I do not know, other than from what I have read in the newspapers, which I do not think is a position I or any other member of the house should have to be in today, what amendments he will suggest. Some doubts, however, have been expressed by some persons who have occupied high places in the courts. The committee should examine very carefully and fully the question of constitutionality of the bill and should be prepared to take expert advice in an effort to satisfy members that the bill is either constitutional or as to what amendments are necessary in order to remove any real question about its constitutionality.

We must consider the future of our country, the tensions which exist in our country and the urgency of easing these tensions. The bill will not be welcomed by all Canadians. It is my own belief that we must be prepared to pay some price for Canada, some price for the country that was established 100 years ago and some price for a country which we believe to be a good country, a country in which it is good to live and a country which has a great contribution to make to the world.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: But it is a country which is diverse and complex. There is a constant problem and there must be a constant process of readjustment and reconciliation. The people in all parts of the country have a right to expect adequate consideration of their problems. There is a widespread feeling in many parts of the country that economic problems are being neglected by the government.

Part of the difficulty in the present context is the feeling that the government has been