

Official Languages

is aware constantly of the fact that its implementation will require some years of education, with positive attention being paid to the removal of misunderstanding and prejudices across the country. This bill will be of value to Canada only if the government is sensitive to the need to remove the fears of employees of the government and of its corporations and agencies, as well as those who may want to become employees of the government and its crown corporations in the future, and applies this law with sensitivity to the factors I have outlined.

• (3:50 p.m.)

This bill will work only if the government has sense enough to appoint members to the Bilingual Districts Advisory Board who will in fact be representative of the various sections of this country as well as the various minorities to be found right across Canada. This bill will be of value only if this government will have the intelligence and sensitivity to appoint as commissioner a person who understands what makes Canada tick and what are the various streams and currents in our country's life, and if it will avoid, as I have said more than once, replacing one injustice which we are trying to remove with a new injustice which will merely serve to divide this country all over again. No words in the bill will accomplish this.

Mr. Dinsdale: We must be concerned about the spirit of the law.

Mr. Lewis: Yes. The spirit of the law will be important. You may have 12 members on the advisory board to represent every province and territory and they may be a bunch of copper-headed, obstinate, adamant, insensitive people who will ride roughshod over the situation. If that is the case the bill will have accomplished nothing. It will not have given us anything of value.

Mr. Woolliams: May I ask the hon. member a question? How does he distinguish between the rule of law and the rule of a person who may be a dictator? As I understood him, he said that nothing has been written into the bill to protect any of us. Surely we prefer to be ruled by law and not to be ruled by people who may be dictators.

Mr. Lewis: It must be my fault that the hon. member for Calgary North did not hear me. Or perhaps he was listening to a more important conversation. I do not know. I did not say at all or suggest at all what he says I said or suggested. I said that the quality of

the people who will serve on the board and act as commissioner is an important consideration.

Mr. Woolliams: I know.

Mr. Lewis: It is most important to see that the right kinds of people are appointed. It is the way in which the government will approach this matter and the way in which the minister responsible for implementing this law will approach it that is important. If the minister responsible for implementing the law, whoever he may be, is an obstinate, copper-headed bull in a china shop and appoints people who display a like attitude, then this law will be a disaster. But if the government and the minister and the people appointed all approach this law with the sensitivity it requires, then I believe we shall have taken a tremendous step in removing an important grievance from which some of our people have suffered for a century. That is why I support the principle of the bill.

To make further reply to the hon. member, I was trying to say that the quality of the people who take over the job of actually administering the law is not something you can write into the bill. Whether you have 10 members or 12 members on the board will not in the end make much difference if the kinds of people appointed are people who will implement the law in the wrong way.

I am prepared to place the responsibility where, in my view, it lies. Hon. members will be here as Members of Parliament and parliament will be here. If the government approaches this law in a way in which some hon. members fear it may—I have not seen enough evidence to warrant that fear but I am as watchful as any other hon. member—we shall take appropriate action. My colleagues and I will be as watchful as any members of the house to make sure that this law helps Canadian unity and does not hinder it, that it unites us and does not divide us, and that it does not place any Canadian at an unnecessary or unjust advantage vis-à-vis the government and vis-à-vis employment in the public sector, whether that employment is in the Public Service or in a Crown corporation. But the responsibility lies with the treasury benches. I am prepared to leave that responsibility where it lies and to speak to the people of Canada when the time comes if that responsibility is not carried out as it ought to be.

As I indicated at the beginning of my remarks, I cannot support the amendment.