

National Arts Centre

just read, which is to the effect that in the appointment of members and officers of the corporation due account will be taken of the linguistic duality of Canada and its cultural plurality.

In this clause and this amendment we are dealing with a corporation which will have management responsibility for a cultural activity in our national capital that will, I am sure, be of significance and value to all of Canada. I am sure all members of the committee recognize that in the membership of boards and agencies of the government, and in particular in the membership of the board of this particular corporation, there should be as broad representation as possible of our cultural variety, something that adds strength, colour and greatness to our Confederation.

I am sure we also recognize that the membership of a board of this kind should reflect the two official languages which signalize the dualism of our political origins and recognize that French is the language in this country of a cohesive cultural group, customarily used by a large majority in one province and by a very large minority in another province.

In the membership of boards and federal agencies this duality of language and also our plurality of culture are now recognized in fact, as I could show by referring to the composition of such agencies. I have studied all of the existing federal agencies and there is no doubt that these considerations are recognized in the appointments to these boards. However, Mr. Chairman, I think it is unwise and also unnecessary to include commitments relating to recognition of this kind in legislation itself, as my right hon. friend pointed out the other day, because in my view this could freeze a situation in a way which might hinder rather than help the achievement of the objective we have in mind—which is broad representation with appropriate recognition of the two official languages.

• (5:10 p.m.)

This principle of representation, as I said, is now accepted in practice and in custom. Sometimes practice and custom become very deeply embodied in a constitution, sometimes even more deeply embodied in a constitution than are some of the actual provisions of that constitution. As this now has become embodied by practice I suggest it might have a disunifying rather than a unifying effect to write it specifically into an act of parliament

23033-441

as a legislative obligation. It could lead later to misunderstanding rather than greater understanding between English speaking and French speaking Canadians.

I can only give a specific assurance, and I am very glad to do so, for the present government, but I am quite certain any Canadian government will always take due accord of the linguistic and cultural factors mentioned in the amendment in respect of the appointment of the members and officers of government boards and agencies. I think that anyone who studies the appointments which have been made over the years will be assured that this is being done. I do not think there can be any possible doubt on this score for the future.

In the circumstances, Mr. Chairman, while recognizing the essential desirability of the principle and while certainly accepting the good intentions and worthy purpose of the hon. member who has moved the amendment, our colleague from Lévis, nevertheless many members of the house are worried about the implication which might be read into its incorporation in legislation and perhaps the harmful effect of a recorded division on such a vote in this house. It is because of considerations of that kind and not because I am in any way, shape or form opposed to the principle involved in the amendment—I am sure no member of the committee is opposed to the principle involved in the amendment—that I would not be able to support the amendment. Yet, it would be very difficult indeed to vote against it because of the considerations I have mentioned and because of the principle involved.

So I venture to ask the hon. member for Lévis whether in the circumstances he would ask leave of the house to withdraw his amendment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guay: Mr. Chairman, over a week ago I moved an amendment to clause 4 of Bill No. C-194 so that the appointments made under the said clause would take into account Canada's linguistic duality and cultural plurality.

Never at any time did I believe that such an amendment could result in appeals and assure us that the principles put forth would be judicially respected. I was merely trying to elaborate the embryo of a general policy which would apply in federal institutions.

Since the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Pearson) has just announced formally and