

Oral Questions

foundland—which indicated during last spring's federal-provincial conference their intention to accept that principle—the leadership necessary to meet the wish of the provinces, or of at least five of them, that linguistic rights be entrenched in the constitution?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member made a distinction between the positions taken in the Pepin-Robarts report, which involved all provinces, and his questions where he talks about a majority of provinces. It would be preferable for us to come to an agreement affecting all provinces. However, it is an option we are prepared to consider as valid should it be possible to come to an agreement with several provinces and not be necessary to force a position upon the other provinces which disagree.

[English]

INQUIRY WHETHER MINORITY LANGUAGE RIGHTS WILL BE ON AGENDA OF FORTHCOMING FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCE

Mr. Hal Herbert (Vaudreuil): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will surely recognize that the statement made by the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations has at least led to the interpretation of the government's point of view that the government is in favour of entrenching minority language rights in the constitution.

This appears to be some change from previous statements of the Prime Minister. I would like to ask him if something has happened to make him change his mind on this very important issue and whether, in that case, since he is prepared to discuss it with the provinces, he is prepared to put the item on the agenda of the coming meeting of first ministers.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Minister of State and I have indicated the interest of this government in having the entrenchment of various rights including those to which the hon. member refers. We have made that point recently and in the past.

We have also made the point very clearly that in our judgment it is preferable, in a matter of this kind, to proceed with agreement rather than creating a circumstance in which a population or a province feels it is having imposed upon it a right with which it is not comfortable. In relation to the question of the agenda, it is certainly a matter that we would hope to have on the agenda of the first ministers' meeting.

Mr. Herbert: Mr. Speaker, in that case, and since he is going to put it on the agenda of the first ministers' meeting, could I ask the Prime Minister whether he has now notified the governments of the provinces that this is a subject to be discussed, has he had any indication from them as to whether they are willing to discuss the subject and, in fact, is the matter now actively with the public servants who will be preparing the position papers for the government at the first ministers' meeting?

[Mr. Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier).]

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, the matter was discussed at an official level on the fifteenth and sixteenth. It will be discussed again by the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations when he meets with his provincial counterparts in a week's time.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

CONFISCATION OF PERSONAL PAPERS OF JOURNALIST—
RETURN THEREOF

Mr. Terry Sargeant (Selkirk-Interlake): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the right hon. Prime Minister. During the raid on the home of journalist JoAnn Gosselin, RCMP officers confiscated many personal papers and notes pertaining to other stories being researched by Miss Gosselin unrelated to the case being investigated.

Will the Prime Minister investigate and report to this House the justification for these papers not yet having been returned to Miss Gosselin, thus adversely affecting her ability to pursue her livelihood?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, naturally I will look into the question. I am sure the hon. member would join me in understanding that it would be most improper for any member of this House to interfere with a criminal investigation that is now properly under way.

Mr. Sargeant: I can understand that, Mr. Speaker. Last week, the Prime Minister indicated to the House that he would release the guidelines which permitted the RCMP to raid Miss Gosselin's home and seize these papers. Is he now in the position to release these guidelines, and is he prepared to indicate to this House if these guidelines also cover investigations by the RCMP of members of Parliament such as myself who have obtained similar information?

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I should have been more precise in my earlier answer, in that what the government would not want to contemplate—as I am sure no member of the House would—is interference in an investigation which might involve a breach of the criminal law. To my knowledge, there has been no evidence found to this point that such a breach has, in fact, occurred; although that was the cause of the instigation of the inquiry.

In relation to the guidelines, I am now informed that the guidelines which prompted the action of the Deputy Minister of National Defence were, in fact, informal documents which had not been approved by the Government of Canada—the predecessor government or our own—and, indeed, of whose existence until this affair I did not know. We are now preparing new guidelines which will bear the imprimatur of the authority of cabinet. Since the guidelines that were followed in this instance did not have the imprimatur of this or any previous government, I think in the circumstances it would be improper for us to lay them on the Table.