

Adjournment Debate

I want to assure the House that the action taken by the Department of National Revenue with the yes referendum committee in this situation is the same that the department would take with any other registrant in similar circumstances.

• (1815)

I assure the House that the Department of National Revenue administers the Excise Tax Act in such a manner that all taxpayers are treated equitably and fairly.

[*Translation*]

LANGUAGE MINORITIES

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, on March 8, 1993, I asked the Secretary of State whether she had embarked on serious negotiations with the provinces to set up school management in those provinces that continue to show some reluctance, namely Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Newfoundland. I will get to the other provinces later.

The minister answered that she was discussing with her colleagues "a series of measures to help the provinces"—those are her very words—and that she expected to be able to start discussions with the provinces in the coming weeks.

Let me give some historical background. In the Mahé case, in Manitoba, three years ago, and more recently—just a couple of weeks ago as a matter of fact—in the case of the Manitoba Parents' Committee Federation, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that minorities have the constitutional right to manage their own educational institutions. In fact, it has ruled that Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms grants parents from the linguistic minority of that province the right to manage and control the educational facilities where their children receive education.

How much further ahead are we now, 11 years after adopting this Charter? There are of course quite appalling disparities. I admit that there have been negotiations between the federal and provincial levels of government. The fact remains that Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Newfoundland are holding out. On the other hand, the Atlantic provinces of

Canada, which are not the richest, agreed and have implemented a series of measures to put management in the hands of their minorities. In Quebec, the anglophone minority has been managing its own schools, from elementary to postsecondary, for quite a while.

The provinces that put up the most resistance or reluctance are not the poorest. Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia certainly cannot be labelled as poor. But the federal government said: "It is going to provide them with financial assistance." They have been negotiating for years now. Last year, I had hope because the then Secretary of State, the hon. member for Berthier—Montcalm, had suggested to me in this House that an agreement would be signed very shortly. The federal government promised some help. Negotiations have been going on for quite a few years now. I was very hopeful last year. The then Secretary of State had indicated to me in the House that an agreement was about to be signed. But nothing happened. Now we have a new Secretary of State who tells me that negotiations are still ongoing.

Where is the political will of this government to negotiate a comprehensive agreement with all the provinces in order to give members of our linguistic minorities the right to manage their own institutions, a right which is entrenched in the Constitution?

My question is simply this: What progress have we made in these negotiations? I understand that the new minister is attempting to meet with the province of Ontario, for instance, and come to some agreement on certain issues. It is not easy, I know. The NDP government in Ontario turns a deaf ear and claims that it has not heard from the minister in quite some time now. But I know full well that it is not so and that she has been trying to meet with it time and time again and to speak with the minister of education and skills development.

Now the said minister claims that the federal government is spiteful and acts in bad faith. I am sorry but I have to ask the parliamentary secretary to set the record straight. We must know what is going on. Is the federal government negotiating with the province of Ontario or not? Is there a general agreement regarding school management between the federal government, the western provinces and Ontario?