

*Official Languages**[Translation]*

To say this will be interpreted by some as trying to tell the provincial governments what to do. But what is really being said is simply that this is one of the major facts evident in our experience with the policy thus far. One of the principles the government advocates, again as the statement makes clear, is that Canadians have a right to have their children educated in the official language of their choice, and the necessary facilities should be provided wherever numbers warrant. In other words, the federal government has concluded from its review of language policy experience thus far that Canadians must have freedom of choice to have their children educated in either of the official languages anywhere in this country, in future, if this country is to survive as a unified Canada.

But the statement also recognizes that there is only one province in Canada at this moment in our history where that freedom of choice can be fully exercised, and that is the province of Quebec. The government is saying in this policy statement that the freedom of choice that the education system of Quebec has always provided, as far as education in either official language is concerned, must now be extended across the other provinces. Our statement recognizes that this cannot be achieved over night, and this is why this principle has the qualifying phrase that the implementation of the principle is subject to circumstances which may make a deferment of application necessary. Bill No. 1, now under debate in Quebec, is a reflection of a twofold apprehension: apprehension about the future security of the French language and culture of Quebec, and apprehension also about the way the rest of Canada will, in future, be prepared to treat the French language.

There would be little ground for the extreme concern over the French culture and linguistic base in Quebec if there was confidence that French would, in fact and not just in law or formal statement, be treated with equality as a language and with respect as both language and culture throughout this country.

The federal government is convinced that this confidence is a vital factor in preserving the unity of Canada. The principle that Canadians have a right to have their children educated in the official language of their choice also recognizes that the people of Quebec might decide that circumstances there could require a determination that full freedom of choice should be deferred until present elements of insecurity for the French language and culture are removed or reduced.

[English]

In view of the considerable insecurity at the moment in Quebec concerning the preservation of French in that province, it is the responsibility of Canadians from all provinces to make the status of the French language more secure in Canada. But as long as the present insecurity persists, the government agrees that the deferment of this principle may be necessary. In the same manner, it is to be hoped that other provinces will strive toward the application of this principle. But practical circumstances of a financial nature, for instance, may some-

times force a deferment of application. In other words, this principle is an objective toward which we should strive.

May I emphasize that this statement on language policy is not intended in any way to be a substitute for discussion of constitutional issues which provincial governments may wish to raise and which the federal government recognizes remain important in relation to all of our problems.

As the statement tabled today points out, the government has never thought of the official languages policy as a cure-all for every problem of national unity. The government recognizes that we have serious economic problems. We must continue to resist inflation. We must improve the employment situation. The feeling of alienation in western Canada, problems of regional disparities, the need to find new sources of energy, to improve our transportation systems—all of these, and many other problems, must also be dealt with. But underlying and overshadowing all of these problems are the continuing problems of national unity, and at the heart of the national unity problem is the problem of languages and the need for the wider application of all that equality of our official languages implies.

As the languages statement points out, the rights provided by the official languages policy are not of benefit to Canadians of British and French origin alone. The acceptance and enjoyment of diversity that is encouraged by the policy is gradually spreading to more and more Canadians. This is steadily improving the climate of understanding in which Canadians of other cultural backgrounds can enjoy their own cultural heritage. The statement goes to some lengths to point out that there is a very important difference between the state's involvement in languages policy and the state's involvement, or attempt to be involved, in cultural policy.

This government believes that attempts to mould people who speak the same language into a homogeneous cultural pattern endanger their very freedom. Canada has two official languages, but it has no official culture, and government efforts to advance the cultural life of English and French speaking Canadians are intended only to promote the cultures of Canadians as individuals, not any culture of the state. The official languages policy, as the statement makes very plain, is intended to be the basis for an everwidening personal freedom in a society that cares profoundly for protection and strengthening of distinctive minority groups that determine the richly varied character of this country. The statement tabled today does not deal with possible changes in the application of the languages policy within the federal public service, as I indicated last week. This will be dealt with in a later statement.

I recommend that all members of this House read the statement with care. May I also emphasize that all references to provincial responsibilities in the statement are intended as statements of belief derived from our experience with the policy to date and its potential for helping to solve some of our current unity problems. These references constitute a plea to the provinces for understanding and support of the official languages policy to a greater extent than ever before.