

Supply—Finance

that fact—and Mr. Duplessis, on the other hand, judging from past experience, will not present new proposals.

The problem remains, however, and the solemn promises made by the followers of the Minister of Finance in the province of Quebec are not yet fulfilled. They are trying their best now to forget the commitments they gave during the last campaign and I am told that they are prepared to support federal grants to universities on the basis of the St. Laurent formula, as they did last year in this house. We all remember very well, of course, that all the Quebec Conservative members who were present in the house last year, including the hon. member for Quebec East and the member for Bellechasse, voted in favour of those grants to universities. To show how inconsistent their position is, most of them refused this year to support federal contributions for the construction of the trans-Canada highway. They voted in favour of federal grants to universities, which not long ago they claimed were unconstitutional, but they do not accept federal grants for the construction of the trans-Canada highway, on the ground that such federal assistance is a menace to provincial autonomy and to the French Canadian culture.

This is not, however, the only inconsistency that they have shown. During the present session the hon. member for Bellechasse, who I am sure would not deny his position as one of Mr. Duplessis's spokesmen in this house, explained his attitude on federal grants to universities. He re-stated his former position that such grants were unconstitutional, that they were a violation of our constitution. For those who want to look at it, it can be found at page 2947 of *Hansard*. But having said that—and immediately I admit that he is entitled to his own opinion, as is any other hon. member of this house, and he is entitled to place his own personal interpretation on the constitution—he went on to explain why last year he had voted in favour of those grants. He said this and I quote:

(Translation):

To that, as far as I am concerned, I reply that, being a federal member, I could not afford to ignore the nine other provinces which had raised no objection in principle and felt no inconvenience of a regional nature in accepting the grants. I could not afford to ignore the fact that the universities and colleges of those provinces had drawn up their budget and their development projects in the light of the precedent of 1952, which has been firmly established ever since. Nor could I afford to ignore that, in those provinces and within those colleges and universities there are fellow compatriots of mine, of the same origin as my own, who have derived and still are deriving from those grants, unquestionable benefits without which they would

have found it difficult to insure the survival of their institutions of higher learning. Nor could I afford to ignore that, among the ten provinces of the confederation, there are some which, unfortunately, are not financially in a position to provide for the maintenance and development of their own institutions of higher learning.

That is the end of the quotation, which may be found on page 2947 of *Hansard* for April 22, 1959, English version.

(Text):

So, sir, in attempting to explain his attitude the hon. member was also attempting to justify the position of all his Quebec colleagues who like him last year voted in favour of federal grants to universities. This statement is a most inconsistent and dangerous position to take for so-called champions of provincial autonomy and defenders of the constitution. In effect they say this. What the federal government is doing in this respect is clearly a violation of the constitution, and the province of Quebec is against it and we will support that measure because the nine other provinces are not opposed to such federal assistance.

In other words, the position of those Quebec Conservative members can be summarized by the following proposition: We from the province of Quebec accept and support a clear violation of the constitution of our country if the nine other provinces do not object to that violation. Is this the way the Quebec Conservative members intend to defend what they think is a clear provision of our constitution? If it is, then they are the most dangerous enemies of provincial autonomy and of our constitution.

But this is not the whole story. Having accepted that the constitution might be violated in this respect in so far as the nine provinces are concerned, they ask for a special deal for Quebec which would take the form of an unconditional subsidy to the provincial government in lieu of the present federal grants to universities. The Minister of Finance would find it difficult to refuse such a proposal because of the peculiar interpretation he gave in his budget speech to federal grants to universities. At page 2410 of *Hansard* he presented a table showing federal contributions to the provinces, and he included university grants in that table. For the Minister of Finance, therefore, university grants are a federal contribution to the provinces.

If this is the purpose of such grants—as far as I am concerned I do not think so—then why not give that kind of assistance directly to the provinces? To say, as the Minister of Finance did, that federal grants to universities are intended to help the provinces, is stating