

Quebec and France Exchange of Letters

It may not be necessary, but I should like to urge upon members of the government the importance, first of all, of trying to settle these matters in discussion with the provinces generally, the importance of trying to reach a satisfactory settlement, and of course the importance of recognizing that the spirit of co-operation must work both ways if it is to be effective.

I am confident that the members of this government will in fact try to work out this problem in a co-operative way, but I draw attention to the urgency of working it out in advance, so that it does not recur time and time again in the form of disputes over specific questions which have the effect of generating heat and making an ultimate solution more difficult as time goes on.

Mr. David Lewis (York South): I cannot but note, and note with approval, the careful language and the mildness of the reproof to the two governments involved, contained in the statement made by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, particularly to the government of the great and friendly nation of France. Perhaps, since I am not a member of the government, I can say as one Canadian that I am beginning to be rather irritated by the way in which the mischievous old man in Paris seeks to add to our difficulties in Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lewis: I wish to join with the Leader of the Opposition in emphasizing, if emphasis is necessary, that the entire question of international relations in respect of areas which are under provincial jurisdiction does require continuing study with the provinces, and a solution which is of a general nature so as to avoid these confrontations from time to time. I have always felt unhappy as a Canadian that there should be many conventions and the like to which Canada has subscribed at various international organizations, but has been unable to ratify or implement because of the nature of jurisdiction inside this country.

May I say that I was a little surprised that the Secretary of State for External Affairs seemed to feel there was something undesirable about the letters exchanged in connection with investments. There is nothing new about provinces seeking foreign investment. Many of the provinces of Canada have been doing this over a long period of time.

We do agree entirely that in an area of exclusive federal jurisdiction like telecommunications, it is important for the government of Canada to remain and to be firm, to insist that in that field the government of Canada must be consulted, that it must have the initiative and must continue to have exclusive jurisdiction, even though in practice part of the exercise of that jurisdiction may be delegated to the provinces within their own exclusive field.

Therefore we approve both of the firmness which is implied in the statement, and the necessarily careful language in which that firmness was expressed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, the minister stated yesterday, I think, in answer to a question, that he was studying the correspondence between Quebec and France regarding their latest arrangements and today he made a statement to the effect that he has studied those agreements.

Hon. members have not had, like him the good fortune to study the correspondence exchanged by the governments of Quebec and France, but I think that, reading the statement made this morning by the minister, one cannot help but feel that we are a little sensitive when Quebec has dealings with France.

The minister recognized that the signing of those agreements between the governments of Canada and France dates back to 1965 and that the latest arrangements made between the French government and the government of Quebec are meant only to continue those agreements.

It seems that two criticisms are implied in the minister's statement. When France plans to invest more in Quebec, we think it is normal and when it means that Quebec will get into debt, even if the investments come from France, we think that it is logical and that the government of Quebec has not gone too far.

However, when the French government signs letters of intent with the government of Quebec, regarding education, we become a bit nervous. I feel that we get nervous a little too easily, as the next federal-provincial conference will have to settle the question of telecommunications which comes within the jurisdiction of the federal government, and the question of education which comes within the exclusive competence of the provinces. If today the minister seems to say that the government of Quebec should have put more trust in the government of the country, I