

*Dominion-Provincial Conference*

there and that the unaccustomed snow has disappeared.

**An hon. Member:** It might warm up.

**Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):** Well, it is true that Premier Bennett is back there. In any event, I shall be meeting with the attorneys-general, Sterling Lyon of Manitoba, R. Peterson of British Columbia, D. V. Heald of Saskatchewan, and Edgar J. Gerhart of Alberta in the Empress Hotel on Monday morning. I shall attempt to allay some of their fears about the constitutional aspects of the bill, and some of their fears about the effects of the bill. I am going out there committed in principle but flexible as to changes in detail they may have in mind in terms of phraseology, and so on.

I told the conference that the effect of the bill on the life of the average Canadian living in the four western provinces had been exaggerated. I think its effect on the everyday lives of English-speaking Canadians there will, in practice, be fairly limited. Our officials discussed with the attorneys-general of the other provinces the possibility of a meeting. The attorneys-general of the Atlantic provinces and of Ontario have indicated that they see no urgency about meeting with me at the present stage. I am arranging, however, to visit Quebec City in about ten days' time to discuss with the Prime Minister of the Province of Quebec the aspects of the bill which cause him difficulty. When our discussions have been completed I shall, of course, be reporting to the government and I hope we shall be in a position then to proceed with the bill on second reading at an early date.

**Mr. Stanfield:** May I ask the minister a question? Could he, on his return, make a report to the house?

**Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):** By all means. I think the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) understands the position we take. If we fail to reconcile our differences over the constitutional aspects of the bill, the discussions are without prejudice and the government has reserved its right to proceed with the bill in the House of Commons. If it is challenged by the provinces in a provincial court of appeal, we shall resist that challenge and I suppose our recourse will then be to the Supreme Court of Canada to which the measure would be submitted under section 55 of the Supreme Court Act. Hopefully, this may be avoided.

[*Translation*]

Despite a certain agitation in some provinces with an English-speaking majority, the good will which has been steadily growing in the last few years, is an overwhelming proof of the new tolerance and of the new desire to grant rights to French-speaking minorities.

At this stage of our history it would be ironical and even tragical, if the province of Quebec, where all minority rights have always been respected, refused at this time to support our bill. I was very happy to get in principle, the support of Mr. Bertrand during the Conference. He made a few reservations about what he called the terms of the bill, that is the bilingual districts. I have not quite understood his argument yet.

In the province of Quebec, a few political reasons will make it somewhat difficult to reconcile a certain priority of the French language in Quebec with the equality of the rights of the English minority there, but I do not think that this attitude—if it should materialize—will prevent the inclusion in the federal law of a guarantee for the rights of the English speaking minority. Even if a certain priority is granted to the French language in Quebec, there will be no conflict as to the principle of equality of the official languages in the federal legislation.

I hope that no discussion concerning the importance of the French language in Quebec will be detrimental to the adoption of the principle that has already been accepted in Quebec since Confederation, that is the equality of both languages.

[*English*]

On the question of language rights entrenched in the constitution, the conference, as I have said, agreed that the matter should be considered in the light of section 133 of the British North America Act. This provision, as hon. members know, is the one which provides for the use of the French and English languages in connection with federal and Quebec institutions and the publishing in both languages of acts of parliament and of the Quebec legislature. I think it is fair to say that the goodwill displayed by all of the provinces, even by those which appeared disinclined to entrench language rights at the present time, was most encouraging. I would hope that proceeding from an analysis of section 133, and the recommendations of the B and B Commission, the ministerial committee will be able to define the issues and reach some tentative agreement which can be