

Supply—Finance

Leader of the Opposition. Has this proposal not come to the minister's attention as chairman of the treasury board?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): No, Mr. Chairman.

(Translation):

Mr. Flynn: Mr. Chairman it will come as no surprise to the committee to see me rise following the speech of the hon. member for Laurier (Mr. Chevrier). The member for Laurier never fails to interest me, especially when he speaks for the province of Quebec, a somewhat new role for him. I must say that I do have a peculiar feeling when he says: "We from Quebec, we ask and we say—" Everybody knows, Mr. Chairman, that by far the great majority of Conservative members from Quebec hold university grants to be unconstitutional. The hon. member for Joliette - l'Assomption - Montcalm had expressed his view on this subject last year, as we were reminded by the member for Laurier. The hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Dorion) and from Sherbrooke (Mr. Allard) spoke along the same lines. The hon. member for Laurier reminded us also of other statements attributed to me by the press, last September. In this connection, Mr. Chairman, I would like to make a correction right away. What I have said—and this was in a telephone conversation—boils down simply to this: that most Conservative members from the province of Quebec were opposed to grants to universities and that, further, thought was being given to a solution of some kind, grants earmarked for research purposes, for instance. I did not voice this opinion as being my own but as being that entertained by some of my colleagues who were looking for a solution. In this respect I have always believed—and I still believe—that federal grants to universities are unconstitutional.

That is why, after the speech made by the hon. member for Laurier, I deem it necessary to explain my views which may coincide with those of many of my colleagues.

First, there is section 93 of our constitution which gives provinces exclusive jurisdiction over education. Universities are certainly an essential part of our education system. Nobody ever questioned this fact, and jurisprudence, in its interpretation of the word education, upholds this view.

The hon. member for Megantic (Mr. Roberge) who boldly said that the fathers of confederation did not perhaps think of the

universities when they drafted section 93 because, at that time, Canada had no state university, does not agree with this. His was an extraordinary statement, because, even if no state university existed at that time, at least there were private ones, that is Laval and McGill universities. Anyhow, as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fleming) stressed earlier today, when the time came to establish universities in this country, they were established by provincial authorities.

Indeed, we should not forget that section 93 has a particular significance for the province of Quebec. It is recognized that when confederation was being prepared, French-speaking Canadians of Lower Canada considered section 93 essential for the preservation of their culture, their language and their own individuality. They looked upon that constitutional structure as the essence of their survival. At that time, the province of Quebec was the only French-speaking of the four confederated provinces. Today, while it is the only one in ten, it considers absolute control in this field as more than ever necessary, as an essential guarantee for the preservation of its own individuality, which it believes should be preserved and cultivated for the benefit of Canada as a whole seeing, in short, French culture as serving the Canadian nation.

Mr. Chairman, I am otherwise aware it has been said that we could give grants to universities because nothing in the constitution prevents us from taking out amounts of the consolidated revenue fund in order to make donations to universities.

In that connection, it was recalled that the province of Quebec had made gifts to Toronto and Ottawa universities.

I admit that a genuine gift is constitutional. However, I believe that regular, annual grants do not constitute gifts; they are annuities paid to universities. Moreover, when grants are voted each year, it is just as if some legislation were voted which would establish them on a permanent basis. That which cannot be done directly cannot be done indirectly. If parliament introduced some legislation about permanent grants to universities, I would argue that they are illegal. And it is not an annual vote which would change the problem.

Mr. Chairman, reference was also made to a moral obligation on the part of the federal government, because universities are rendering great services to the state. In my opinion, there is no moral obligation in constitutional