

Inquiries of the Ministry

side, the remarks made by the hon. member for Lapointe (Mr. Grégoire), which were in a sense rather strong, I think that I can establish a parallel with some applause the minister got from the Conservative side when he said that he did not want to do anything, take any step, before making sure that the Eskimos in northern Quebec would get all the guarantees that their rights will be protected and respected by the Quebec government.

Mr. Speaker, I entirely agree with that point of view according to which the Eskimos of Quebec must be assured, before being transferred to the province, that their rights and prerogatives will be fully protected.

On the other hand I am asking myself the following questions. Why are we questioning the good will of the province of Quebec in granting this protection? What are the reasons for the minister, the government, or any other member of this house, to question the intentions of the Quebec government in this matter?

Personally, I have followed this debate and I fail to see on what grounds we can disagree with this transfer of jurisdiction over the Eskimos to the province of Quebec. In my opinion, the whole history of Quebec is there to prove, beyond all doubt, that we are respectful of the rights and privileges of the residents of our beautiful province of which we are proud.

In closing my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a suggestion which I hope to see accepted.

It is perhaps slightly humorous, but I think just the same it is worth taking into consideration.

I would ask the Prime Minister, who is not here at the moment, or his spokesman whether he could not, in view of the present conflict—the breaking off of negotiations between the federal and provincial ministers—delegate as a negotiator in Quebec, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) or Mr. Tom Kent from the Prime Minister's office who managed, as we have seen, to negotiate an agreement in the deadlock which followed the last federal-provincial conference in Quebec.

Following that conference there was a deadlock and everyone wondered where it would lead us. It seems to me that the Minister of Transport, during one of his short trips, as the one he has just made to London, for example, with the assistance of Mr. Tom Kent, managed to find a solution which, even

if it was not acceptable to everyone, has at least eased the situation.

I hope the Prime Minister will delegate the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate to Quebec city who, in a short trip, probably in a Department of Transport jet, will bring back our two opponents, Messrs. Laing and Lévesque, on more favourable ground toward full co-operation in the interest of our fellow citizens, the 2,500 Eskimos of northern Quebec.

Hon. Paul Martineau (Pontiac-Témiscamingue): In his statement, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Mr. Laing) has listed the safeguards which must be granted if we want to be assured that all the interests of the Eskimos will be respected when they are transferred.

On this side of the house we are in favour of such safeguards and we showed that very clearly when this matter was discussed.

In his statement, however, the minister did not refute the very specific charges which had been made in the Quebec legislature by a minister of the province of Quebec.

Here are these two charges:

1. The Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources has allegedly lifted the veil of silence which he had himself imposed and which had been agreed upon as far as the progress of these negotiations was concerned, by making, first, a public statement in Winnipeg and other statements in the house.

2. That in his new statement the minister has completely and openly violated the agreement in principle concluded on February 29 between himself and his officials on one hand and the Quebec minister of natural resources and his officials on the other hand.

The minister must necessarily supply us with an explanation on that matter.

How can the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson), in reply to a question directed to him today, claim that those negotiations are still going on when, according to the statement of one of the main parties involved, namely Hon. René Lévesque, they were broken off deliberately due to the personal intervention of the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources?

It is really a pity that such a deadlock occurred. I believe that it is desirable, in order to settle that question and especially in the interest of the Eskimos themselves, that the Prime Minister step in directly with the head of the Quebec government and that he appoint, as of now, a new federal negotiator,