

Giving N.B. equal status a betrayal, PQ says

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The Globe and Mail

QUEBEC

In one of his last public statements as Premier of Quebec, Pierre Marc Johnson accused Prime Minister Brian Mulroney yesterday of betrayal in giving New Brunswick the same status as Quebec at the francophone summit to be held in Paris in January.

Mr. Mulroney announced on Friday that he had ratified an agreement with New Brunswick Premier Richard Hatfield to this effect.

On Nov. 8, Mr. Johnson announced that Quebec had succeeded in negotiating the same status at the summit that Quebec achieved at the Agence de co-operation technique et culturel des pays francophones 15 years ago.

"I believe that the Canadian Government, in betraying both the spirit and the letter of the agency, wants to let it be known by this unilateral decision, that it can put Quebec in a situation with is unfortunate and regrettable," Mr. Johnson said. "(It) is an obvious attempt to dilute Quebec's presence."

He said he found the federal Government's gesture "astonishing," because Quebec had negotiated its position as a "philosophic

extension" of its position at the agency.

"At the agency," he said, "there are only two seats for Canada: one for the federal Government, and one for Quebec. I don't know if the francophone countries will accept Canada having three seats."

He said, however, that it was not up to Quebec to decide on the status of New Brunswick.

Asked if he saw a message concerning Quebec's future constitutional status, Mr. Johnson replied: "I'd rather see it as a mistake by someone in Ottawa who has forgotten the rules of the agency. Obviously, if the federal Government wants to dilute Quebec's presence at the summit, it's declaring hostility towards the Quebec Government, whoever is in power."

Mr. Johnson told reporters that he had spoken to premier-elect Robert Bourassa on the subject yesterday afternoon.

"There has been in the past 25 years a large consensus in Quebec on these issues, on our interests on the international level," Mr. Johnson said. "(Mr. Bourassa) is extremely sensitive to that."

Mr. Johnson spoke to reporters after his first caucus meeting with his 22 opposition colleagues, and a meeting yesterday morning with all

of the Parti Québécois candidates.

He said he had decided to withdraw the regulations on Quebec's film law, which compelled U.S. distributors who did not hold world rights on their films to work through Quebec distributors, because the regulations would bind the incoming Government.

"We would not take that decision," he said, "since we would not assume the consequences."

He contradicted outgoing Cultural

Affairs Minister Gérald Godin, who had said that the U.S. Government had threatened a film boycott of Quebec if the regulations were not withdrawn.

"I am not dismissing the fact that the usual reservations were made by the American consul-general," Mr. Johnson said. "That's normal, par for the course."

He said that there had been pressure by the U.S. film distributors on Quebec theatre owners.