

Official Languages

been held since 1867, and all that ever was debated in those meetings boils down to money, and the question to know who would tax whom and who would tax the most? This type of situation has prevailed for the past 110 years. We are going to have to come back to sense, at the grass-roots of our Confederation, and let the provinces have what belongs to them and let the federal government administer in those areas in which it should exercise its authority. When this is done, then, we will start living in a true Confederation.

● (1730)

[English]

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of questions to ask the Secretary of State (Mr. Roberts). There is one reference in his statement, and I am reading from page 2 of the English language copy, in which the government agrees to something. That is so rare in this House that I want to know precisely to what it is agreeing. The sentence to which I refer on page 2 reads:

But as long as the present insecurity persists, the government agrees that the deferment of this principle may be necessary.

I am not clear, from the language of this draft, precisely where the government thinks the deferment of that principle may be necessary. Could the Secretary of State elaborate? Is he talking about the deferment of the application of that principle in the province of Quebec, or about the deferment of the application of that principle in other provinces?

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question. I was a bit surprised—and I say this kindly and not contentiously because I am anxious for all parties in the House, to the degree they can, to accept the document—I was a bit surprised at the hon. member's assertion that this should have been done ten years ago and, at the same time, at the indication that he was unhappy, that he doubted or was uncertain about the essential proposition the paper puts forward, which is this: it is essential for the provinces to accept certain responsibilities which fall within provincial jurisdiction and to concentrate particularly on education, that is to say, the provinces should step forward solidly and accept the burden which we think the facts have shown it is essential for them to shoulder, that of accepting the official languages policy in the areas of their jurisdiction.

If I understood the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) correctly, he regards this as an invasion of provincial jurisdiction. Let me make it clear that the government does not consider this document in that light. It considers it, rather, as an invitation to assist in this effort, an invitation to which we will respond if the provinces bring forward proposals as to how they might better do this.

That same point refers to the question of consultation, which the hon. member raised. The paper was not delivered to provincial governments en passant, by a civil servant who happened to be passing through via Air Canada. I, as Secretary of State, made a special effort to see as many provincial governments as I could to discuss with them the contents of

[Mr. Gauthier (Roberval).]

the paper. I do not wish to indicate that they were consulted as to its final form, but there was discussion with them.

I point out to the Leader of the Opposition, as I indicated in the House and in the committee of the House, that there has been consultation with the provincial governments in the whole area of education. They date back at least to last January, when I presented the initial propositions on behalf of the government to the council of ministers of education. Those propositions have been discussed with the provincial governments, and I understand that the provincial governments are preparing a response to them, which I expect will be presented to us some time in September. There have been continuing conversations in that area which most concerns the hon. member, if I may judge from his remarks made today. I am not using his words; the hon. member seemed to be concerned about a possible invasion of provincial jurisdiction. On the contrary, we hope, firmly and strongly, that the provinces will welcome this initiative and will see too, as we now do, the necessity of shouldering these burdens in their jurisdiction.

I am tempted to say that the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) regarded the problem somewhat differently. He was asking for greater intervention in the provincial area, while the Leader of the Opposition feared we would interve in that area. I point out to both hon. members that we are involved in this area substantially now, and when the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby complains that so little has been done, the fact is that in this decade alone, that is to say since 1970, over \$650 million of federal funds has been directed to these purposes. Virtually two thirds of a billion dollars of federal funds have been directed to these purposes in the area of education.

Mr. Fairweather: This is all very nice, but you are not answering the question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I suggest the hon. member is quite right. The minister should try to answer the question. I do not want to preclude him from giving an answer, but I would not want him to make another statement. If hon. members agree, I think we should end this question period at about ten to six. We should end routine proceedings before six o'clock, after which we can proceed with the adjournment debate. Perhaps the minister will answer the question quickly, after which I shall recognize four or five other hon. members.

Mr. Roberts: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I was carried away. let me answer the question the hon. member asked. The explicit answer is this: the principle of free choice, both outside the province of Quebec and within the province of Quebec, we accept. It may not be possible to implement it outside Quebec because of lack of facilities, financial constraints, and so on.

As for applying the principle within the province of Quebec, let me say that we understand and sympathize with the public's perception of the insecurity of the French language and French culture. We understand therefore that in that context it may be regrettably necessary not to persist now with the immediate implementation of that principle of free choice