

*Inquiries of the Ministry*

The federal government has not in any way departed from its announced policy as contained in the memorandum of understanding which I announced in the house on March 4 last. The Leader of the Opposition asked me in the house on May 29 whether certain comments attributed to me in press reports amounted to a change in policy, and I stated that the reports of my remarks were inadequate and that the policy had not been changed.

Following the memorandum of understanding the officials of the federal government and of the province of Quebec proceeded with a detailed examination of the problems. Discussions were held frequently throughout the months of March, April and May. Serious differences of outlook between the two governments were made apparent early in the discussions between officials, and in an endeavour to try to overcome these differences Mr. Lévesque and I met in Montreal on April 28, 1964. On May 22 I wrote to Mr. Lévesque to propose that early discussions between he and I to review the work of the officials would be desirable, and on June 1 I received a reply from Mr. Lévesque, dated May 26, agreeing that this course would be satisfactory. On May 22 a meeting of officials was held in Quebec city and telephone discussions have occurred since then. On the afternoon of June 2 a letter reviewing official discussions to date was forwarded by my assistant deputy minister, who has been the senior federal official involved in the negotiations at the official level.

Although points of difference had developed between us, I believed these differences could be resolved. Indeed, further proposals had gone forward as late as yesterday. In the memorandum of understanding of February 29, 1964, it was stated that the governments of Canada and Quebec undertake to consult jointly the Eskimos of nouveau Quebec. The provincial government has insisted that the principle of transfer does not fall within the subject matter of consultation with the Eskimos, and that the range of discussions with the Eskimos rests in the area of techniques of implementation. Our own view has been firmly that the widest range of consultation with the Eskimos must be allowed and the federal government cannot be placed in a position where, because of any agreement with the province of Quebec, we would be forced to impose our views on the Eskimos no matter what the conditions. I do not see that

we have any room for departure from the important principle we have maintained.

A second substantial area of difference has been in the insistence of the provincial authorities on a schedule setting up times by which the transfer of various aspects of administration must be carried out. In our view the transfer must depend upon the confidence of the Eskimos whom we seek to help. An abrupt change is unthinkable without the assent of the Eskimos, and I candidly admit to the house that such assent does not appear immediately forthcoming. There were these and other reported difficulties when Mr. Lévesque and I met on April 28, 1964, in Montreal.

At the meeting I proposed that a study be made by the officials of those areas of administration in which the provincial government could become involved immediately. The Montreal meeting concluded on the basis that the officials would consider this approach thoroughly and report to their respective ministers, after which a further ministerial meeting would be held.

If Mr. Lévesque is rightly quoted as saying that I have personally intended to place a road block in these discussions, then I can only say that it is not so. Mr. Lévesque made an announcement on the basis of newspaper reports which attributed certain remarks to me. On May 29 and on June 1 I was asked questions concerning these reports in this house, and I stated that I was inadequately quoted. Mr. Lévesque made no effort to confirm what I had said, and neither I nor my officials received the benefit of any query from Mr. Lévesque. I can only assume that Mr. Lévesque may have had reasons external to these discussions for his reported announcement.

In the patient and protracted negotiations which have been carried forward by my officials with those of the province of Quebec a positive understanding, forbearance and resilience has been demonstrated worthy of the finest traditions of the civil service of this nation. The impasse to which we seemed repeatedly to return was the definition of consultation with the Eskimo people. We have insisted that consultation be, in fact, consultation. Anything short of this would destroy their sense of personal dignity and human worth. One of the more sacred trusts of this nation is the development to full stature in the nation of its indigenous people.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that before long Mr. Lévesque and I will be able to again