

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[Translation]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES—PROTECTION OF LINGUISTIC RIGHTS OF MINORITIES—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Mr. Speaker, following the ruling by the Quebec Superior Court as to the constitutionality of some sections of Bill 101 concerning the language used in legislation and the administration of justice, I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) if he intended to make further representations to all provincial premiers urging them to formally support the linguistic rights of minorities. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, I refer to the linguistic rights of the French minorities outside the province of Quebec and the English minority in Quebec.

In fact, all governments should make every effort to guarantee to all Canadians, wherever they live in Canada, the right to be served in the official language of their choice in the fields of justice, legislation, administration and education.

In his reply, the Prime Minister told me that in September, he had asked all premiers not only to protect the rights of minorities in the education system, but also to include this protection in the Constitution by means of a constitutional amendment. Since my question did not refer only to linguistic rights in education, I take this opportunity to clearly state my views on this issue of great current interest, namely the basic human rights in a new Canada based on respect and tolerance and built on equality, justice and understanding. The only way for the federal government and the provinces to ensure that basic justice will be to agree on an amendment formula safeguarding linguistic rights.

Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed with the compromise that came out of the premiers' conference held in Montreal last week. After having asserted the right of every child of the English or French minority to be educated in his language, they managed to restrict this right under a second principle which leaves it to the discretion of the provinces to grant that right or not.

I would like to quote these two principles from *Le Devoir* of February 24, 1978. The first one says:

All children belonging to the French-speaking or English-speaking minority in every province have the right to be educated in their language in elementary and secondary schools where the number of students warrants the establishment of such schools.

The second principle is as follows:

It is agreed, in view of the exclusive jurisdiction of provincial governments over education and of the important cultural and demographic differences, that

Adjournment Debate

each province is free to decide how the provisions preceding paragraph shall be applied.

The provinces, Mr. Speaker, have surrendered before the challenge of language equality in the educational field across Canada. I think they have rejected the only valuable guarantee, the constitutional amendment formula ensuring for ever these rights in the field of education.

After the St. Andrews conference which was held last year and where the bargaining between the provinces embarrassed them, the Montreal conference has now put them to sleep for ever. The agreements of reciprocity proposed by Mr. Lévesque were in fact quite embarrassing after 110 years of inequality in the field of educational rights in all the other provinces of Canada.

● (2202)

Last week we heard the provincial premiers say that for some time yet things will remain more or less like they are now. I said for some time, Mr. Speaker, for I feel that very shortly those premiers will have to make up their mind about the Canadian reality. They will have to understand that the English-speaking minority in Quebec and the French-speaking minority outside Quebec must not be treated like pawns in interprovincial bargainings, but that most Canadians are ever more anxious to see that every Canadian citizen be given the constitutional right to receive his education in the official language of his choice.

The federal government has given its support and will certainly continue to support all great efforts in the field of education in all provinces. I am glad to see that the Secretary of State (Mr. Roberts) is here tonight. I know he has undertaken negotiations to reach agreements with regard to the continuation of programs carried on by his ministry to support the education of official language minority groups and the teaching of the second language. I also know the great needs of groups and the need for additional funds for education. On the other hand, I am convinced that the provinces should be publicly answerable for the way they spend those funds.

In view of the two statements that I have read, Mr. Speaker, from the Montreal conference, I think it is urgent for the government to review entirely its financial contribution to the program relating to the minority language in every provincial jurisdiction. The federal government has no other choice. It must fill the abyss of iniquity the premiers have left open. I also feel it is imperative to change the rules of the game so that from now on the federal government can obtain tangible results for every single dollar invested for the teaching of minority school rights.

● (2207)

Hon. John Roberts (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has indeed raised an important issue and I think he is right in emphasizing the importance of the issue of