

Oral Questions

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**INQUIRY WHETHER BUDGETARY CUTS WILL AFFECT FUNDS FOR TEACHING OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the Secretary of State concerning the budgetary cuts and their potential effects on payments under federal-provincial agreements regarding official language teaching which end in March 1979.

My question concerns the use the provinces make of these federal funds and the lack of public information regarding the manner in which this money is allocated by the provinces.

Given the interest expressed by several members of the House and the concerns voiced by spokesmen for non-government organizations over the renewal of these programs for another five years, can the minister tell the House if a total freeze or a cutback will apply to these payments, and if the new agreements provide for an accountability procedure to make public the breakdown of federal funds spent by the provinces to help and encourage the learning and use of the country's two official languages?

Hon. John Roberts (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, there is indeed a freeze on funds available for these payments, which means that another agreement is to be signed for 1979 to 1984. Such an agreement is being negotiated and if we are successful there will be a freeze of about \$140 million on these payments.

The funds may be available if another agreement is signed. The issue raised by the hon. member that concerns the lack of accountability, specific objectives, evaluation of criteria, is precisely one of the aspects which greatly interests us. It must be discussed during the negotiations with the provinces for a new agreement.

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[English]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE**TESTIMONY OF FORMER RCMP COMMISSIONER BEFORE McDONALD INQUIRY**

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Prime Minister a question. The reason and purpose of the question is the following. It is not in reference to what has been the evidence at the McDonald commission, and I agree with the Prime Minister that the commission must weigh the evidence, the pros and cons, and the credibility of witnesses.

My question arises because of the fact that the solicitors general have made statements in the House, in answer to questions asked in the House, which are diametrically opposed to the evidence contained in the depositions yesterday of Mr. Higgitt found at pages 13,757, 13,758 and 13,780. Has the

[Mr. Buchanan.]

Prime Minister read the evidence of Mr. Higgitt and, if he has, has he taken his responsibility as Prime Minister and discussed that evidence with the solicitors general to determine whether the credibility of those ministers in answering questions in this chamber is in question?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I did answer that question yesterday when it was asked of me and I indicated that although I had not read the testimony of Commissioner Higgitt, nor do I intend to read the testimony of the various witnesses before the commission, I had been informed of the particular allegation that he made.

In the short space of time after I learned this at lunch time and the opening of the question period, I asked one former solicitor general who happened to be around whether there was a contradiction. I indicated the answer to that yesterday. But I think it is important to add, because the hon. member used the words that ministers in the House have made statements which are diametrically opposed, and so on, that indeed they have made statements in the House, sometimes prepared statements, sometimes in answer to questions, and I suggest that, unless I am mistaken, it is the rule of the House that we must take a minister at his word—or, in fact, any member of the House at his word—when he makes a firm and clear statement. If members on the other side are claiming to do the contrary, let them stand up and say so and challenge the minister with having in some way made a misstatement or a false allegation. Then the due process of debate will follow. No doubt there will be a reference to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections or the committee on orders and regulations. Until that happens, I suggest that the hon. member for Calgary North and others should take members at their word.

● (1512)

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Prime Minister has set out the rule that we must accept the statements of ministers. Also, I appreciate his other statement that if we take the opposite view, that credibility is in question, we can challenge that question. But we have to get at the facts.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Woolliams: I am asking the Prime Minister, now, if he will read the depositions, then discuss it with the ministers and give us the facts so that we on this side, and parliament, can decide whether those ministers have told us the truth or not.

Mr. Trudeau: I suggest, Mr. Speaker—and perhaps we could appeal to Your Honour's ruling—that the member has no choice but to take the member's word.

Mr. Woolliams: That is not the question.

Mr. Trudeau: If he states clearly a matter on which he has personal knowledge, and states a certain thing to be the fact, we in this House have to accept his word. If we do not, it is not to cross-examine on further questions to challenge his word and then the regulation takes effect.

Mr. Clark: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.