

*Federal-Provincial Relations*

tionary enough to impart a new direction to Confederation."

I oppose this bill because it does not go far enough. I plead with the government to take some constructive steps forward, and to implement constitutional reforms which many people of this country want, in a way which members of this House can support.

**Hon. Martin O'Connell (Scarborough East):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak after the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona (Mr. Roche), who has just spoken. He made thoughtful comments on the measure before us. I was sorry to hear he does not think the measure goes far enough. I hope, before this debate ends, that he will revise his position and consider this as a first step to the achievement of an objective which many support, namely, the improvement of intergovernmental relations. The hon. member suggested that a breakthrough is possible in intergovernmental relations. I think he is right. And the measure the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is suggesting will help us make that breakthrough, and here we are speaking about a breakthrough in the area of intergovernmental relations. It will come about as part of the process of consultation and not as a result of any one move made at any one time. This new position and office will facilitate that process of consultation. I hope, therefore, the hon. member will find it possible to support this measure. Later I shall deal with his suggestion about the desirability of a minister being responsible for this process. I detected in the hon. member's remarks a call for the adoption of a new philosophy of government. I hope he does not share the philosophy of government put forward a few weeks ago by the hon. member for Qu'Appelle-Moose Mountain (Mr. Hamilton).

I welcome this measure because it will enable us to strengthen as well as maintain the balance of our federal system, which includes the federal government, provincial governments and through them, the municipalities.

We are living in a time of turbulence among nations, and it is important to remember that Canada will need to cope with ever more complex problems in the world. These complexities will lead to relations between the federal government and the provinces being even more close and complex than they are today. Responses to the complex pressures to which this country will be subjected must be reflected in the mechanisms which we will develop to smooth out difficulties. We shall establish mechanisms which will maintain a strong federalism and a proper balance within our constitution. For that reason I believe this measure is an important, although not a great step forward on that road.

I also welcome this measure because of the appointment to the new office being created of Mr. Gordon Robertson. During the past two years, when heading the Prime Minister's office, I had occasion to work closely with Mr. Robertson, who was Clerk of the Privy Council and head of the Privy Council office as well as secretary of the cabinet. One can rest assured that if any one person can launch successfully this new institution, that person is Mr. Gordon Robertson. I know well his qualities as a public servant, his wisdom in cabinet deliberations, his skill and his diplomacy and, above all, the reasonableness with which he approaches difficult problems. These qualities

[Mr. Roche.]

are particularly called for in an office that has to deal with different levels of government. Federalism will be well served, not only by the office, but by its first incumbent.

● (1700)

If I followed him correctly, the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona referred to the desirability of having a minister occupy this office. There is a minister who is responsible for federal-provincial relations. That is the Prime Minister. There is no other minister who can perform that function. In my view, it would be a mistake in the short term, and certainly in the long-term sense, to assign the federal-provincial function to a cabinet minister. To appreciate this we must think of the ways in which the two levels of government interface with each other. For example, there are urban affairs, housing, immigration, social affairs, economic policy and the area of resources. If there were a minister responsible for federal-provincial relations, he would be responsible for everything. There are very few activities of one level of government that do not impinge in some way on the other levels.

There are also those areas in our constitution which are jointly shared. How do you find a minister who would necessarily impinge on another minister's jurisdiction in order to carry the federal-provincial concern in cabinet? That minister is the Prime Minister, and only the Prime Minister. The office will be reporting to the Prime Minister giving him the advice and support with which he can coordinate the activities of the other ministers who have more specialized jurisdictions in this particular area. In reply to the hon. member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I say that there is a minister and it can only be the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Roche:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask whether the hon. member will accept a question.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner):** This can only be done with the consent of the hon. member.

**Mr. O'Connell:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Roche:** Mr. Speaker, I rise at this point to ask the hon. member whether he agrees that the argument he is putting forward, namely, that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is the minister responsible, diminishes the strength of this office? We know that the Prime Minister is burdened with all sorts of things. The hon. member knows this more than most of us. How does he expect the Prime Minister to give his full attention to the vital matter of intergovernmental relations when he is preoccupied with many other aspects of government? In effect, will that not then make the incumbent of the office all the more powerful? We must bear in mind that he will be a civil servant. That is the crux of my argument. I wish the hon. member would address himself to that because I am very interested in finding out what he thinks about this. I feel he is undermining his own argument.

**Mr. O'Connell:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I could never agree with him that the Prime Minister would diminish anybody's office. He enhances it. He puts himself in the position of better fulfilling his responsibility by creating this office, and by