

Dominion-Provincial Relations

Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) but I was uncertain whether he was deploring the fact that the government had not brought in legislation that would permit a conglomeration of different standards across the country, so that somebody in Alberta would draw a different pension from that of a person in Ontario, and hospital services in Quebec would be quite different from those in British Columbia. As I say, I am rather at a loss to know what he is objecting to there.

Mr. Gordon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, might I ask whether my hon. friend is speaking on the substance of the bill or on this amendment? If we are going to debate the amendment perhaps we should confine ourselves to that. Certainly I will have something to say about the amendment.

Mr. Cameron (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): I might say in reply to the minister that I presumed I was speaking to the bill and I was referring to the comments made by the hon. member for Edmonton West during his remarks on the bill before he introduced his amendment. I do not think what the minister is suggesting is too clear, but it is the bill itself on which I am speaking.

I do think there is perhaps some criticism to be made in the area mentioned by the hon. member for Edmonton West which is, shall we say, in the area of rigidity. However, this rigidity is not produced by the bill. It has been there throughout the whole period of all these shared cost programs. In many instances I think these conditional grants have been too narrowly circumscribed. I know that in speaking to friends in provincial administrations they have told me that very often the provincial government does not see fit to take up a conditional grant because the expenditure envisaged thereunder is not one that strikes them as being as necessary as some other expenditure. However, that is a matter that has been before the house all the time that these shared cost programs have been in operation, and it would seem to be a rather strange time now to be objecting to them.

I had some misgivings about this legislation when I first heard it rumoured abroad. Naturally because of my particular field of interest I had some misgivings and doubts about a possible reduction of the federal government's fiscal authority to control or to influence the economy of the country. Knowing the close connection between the federal government's taxing, borrowing and spending powers and such matters as monetary

control, stimulation of the economy, and the combatting of unemployment I had, as I say, some misgivings.

Then I made a mistake, and of course it is a very great mistake. I know there are people who say very firmly when they have made up their minds, "Do not confuse me with facts". This is a very dangerous and stupid thing to do—which I proceeded to do—because I found that the effect of the bill is not going to be as earth shaking as some people thought it was going to be. It is not surprising, Mr. Speaker, that whenever this mountain of ineptitude that we dignify with the name "government" goes into labour, it usually produces a pretty small mouse. I discovered that this was not an exception to the rule.

All the facts concerning it are ascertainable, and they all add up to something less than earth shaking. We should be rather careful when we debate this bill because of the possibility of some emotional reactions to it which might be very dangerous. I should like to stress what some of these facts are, so that we can all be clear as to what we are facing.

This afternoon the minister did take the occasion to mention that the particular programs with which this bill deals are all clearly within provincial jurisdiction. I think we can all agree in that regard. There is here no relinquishing of federal responsibility and power in regard to any of the programs. However, we must examine something else. We must examine the size of the programs, because even though the programs involved clearly fall within provincial jurisdiction, under certain circumstances it might be possible to argue that the type of legislation herein proposed might seriously diminish the federal government's authority and power to control the economy, and this is where we must consider the facts of the case; and they are fairly simple.

We find that all the programs involved here, if they were taken up by all the provinces, would amount to a figure of some \$470 million in tax abatements, which amounts to some 21 per cent of the total receipts from personal income tax. That is not going to rock the fiscal boat too dangerously. Even if we take the further step and examine the possibility mentioned by the minister of the gradual inclusion of all programs for which conditional grants are now being made, the total would amount to something less than \$1 billion. I may say that I have received some conflicting figures in this regard, but I gather it would be somewhere in that neighbourhood. This

[Mr. Cameron (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands).]