

*Dominion-Provincial Conference*

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Would the Prime Minister permit a question?

**Mr. Trudeau:** Very gladly.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** I assure him it is a helpful question. In view of the Prime Minister's desire to hear what the opposition has to say, would he stay in the house for the debate today?

**Mr. Trudeau:** It is usually my practice to hear the leaders of all the opposition parties in an important debate such as this and I plan to do so today with the proviso that I have to be in Quebec city by four o'clock and so will have to leave at 3 p.m. This engagement in Quebec was made last fall at the time when the constitutional conference was to have taken place in December. It was postponed through no fault or initiative of the federal government. But I can assure the hon. member that I will read *Hansard* if I miss any important part of the debate.

The matter I have been dealing with was brought into the conference under the heading of distribution of powers, and it is a very important next step in our constitutional debate. We will have to spell out the federal position on the distribution of powers between the federal and the provincial governments. We have not yet reached this stage although, I repeat, some of the provinces have made submissions on it, and therefore we will be anxious to hear the ideas of the opposition on this subject.

We dealt with two aspects of the distribution of powers: the aspect which one would call the spending power and the aspect concerning the taxing power, both of which are linked in a very immediate and direct sense to the whole question of regional disparities. Members of the house know of the tough debate at the conference on the spending power and know as well how we came to the conclusion that a great deal more thought must be given to the use of the spending power. It was obvious that some provinces objected to uses of the spending power which were recognized as essential by other provinces.

For example, some provinces objected to medicare because they said it was a bad use of the spending power, whereas the same provinces pressed for and urged upon us the hospital insurance scheme, which is exactly the same use of the spending power. Some of those who objected to the federal use of the spending power were the very same ones who urged us, for instance, to solve the problems

of housing or pollution and in some cases to come to the aid of Expo in Montreal. Are these areas where the federal government should intervene with its use of the spending power? If so, does it mean we should only use the spending power when the provinces desire that we use it and never when we decide it is good for the country? And does this mean that the federal parliament need not exist, or can only exist as a tool of the provincial governments? We have spelled out our position on some of these issues. We are now asking the opposition to give us the guidance they think they have to offer.

• (12:20 p.m.)

I believe I have asked enough questions. We have indicated the position taken by the federal government on most of these matters in the booklet which was tabled last Friday—"The Constitution and the People of Canada." I just want to remind the opposition before I sit down that it is their duty under the parliamentary system to criticize, and we accept that criticism, generally, in a happy frame of mind. But it is also a duty of the opposition parties to provide plausible alternatives to the policies with which they have disagreed.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Lewis:** Will the Prime Minister permit a question? I know it is sharp but that is because of the way in which he has taunted the opposition. May I ask the Prime Minister when he will cease to be a professor and become the leader of this house?

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Trudeau:** I apologize to the house if the house believes I am lecturing it. That is not my intention. I do not believe it is the role of a professor to taunt and I do not think the hon. member himself thinks it is. I do not know how he can accuse me of speaking like a professor and at the same time of taunting the opposition.

**Mr. Lewis:** It depends on the quality of the professor.

**Mr. Trudeau:** I am prepared to sit down, Mr. Speaker. I urge the leader of the New Democratic Party to give us his ideas in whatever way he desires, in a professorial tone or in his usual demagogic tone.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh.