

Federal-Provincial Relations

ago by the newspaper *Le Devoir* and more particularly by its publisher Mr. Claude Ryan. I have much respect for this man who is certainly one of the most educated minds among Quebec journalists but I do not think that he is fulfilling his role as neutral observer and an enlightened advisor. I do not think that this thinking newspaper is presently playing the role that it could in the Province of Quebec. In my view, this newspaper and its publisher have definitely and deliberately joined the group of those who think that Ottawa is set on saying no to Quebec. They systematically omit to see the federal government's attempts at conciliation for what they are worth, and they even completely ignore any concessions that Ottawa may have made.

Since I am led to mention Mr. Claude Ryan in this House again, I would like to take this opportunity to say that I may have spoken too harshly about him before, during the October 1970 crisis. I think he found himself at that time at the centre of a regrettable controversy which did not do him justice. I hope that my remarks of today will open his eyes and make him realize that there may be people in Ottawa who are not as intransigent as he thinks. I simply ask him to be a little less intransigent himself, and to consider and recognize that this government has shown great flexibility in its negotiations with the province of Quebec in several areas in which observers had said it would be impossible to come to an agreement.

I am thinking particularly of agreements entered into with Quebec concerning international conferences, immigration, and the development plan for the National Capital area, which includes Hull. In other sectors, particularly those of farm products marketing and of taxation, the government invited the provinces to make any suggestions which they thought useful, and later made numerous and substantial amendments in each case, taking their views into account.

I therefore ask Mr. Ryan and all other Quebecers who have some respect for the Canadian experience to reconsider the offer which the Prime Minister made to his counterpart in Quebec in his letter of March 9 last concerning family allowances. This offer represents a major initiative in the field of federal-provincial relations. For the first time, it will be possible for a program established, financed and administered by the federal government to be changed by the law of a province, even if the latter's financial contribution is minimal compared with that of the federal government. This solution provides the provinces with the right to amend the federal plan to meet their individual requirements. It also enables provinces to implement built-in family allowance systems, without disregard for national standards and without jeopardizing the federal function of redistribution. Thus, the citizens' fundamental interests and those of the two levels of government are served this way.

I would also like to see greater interest in the Prime Minister's offer that the principles governing an arrangement over family allowances be extended to other social programs within the framework of a constitutional agreement.

If such principles were entrenched in a new Constitution, Quebec would be provided with the guarantee it is seeking. It is unfortunate and indeed regrettable that the

[Mr. Ouellet.]

Quebec Government has not as yet given a positive answer to the suggestion made by the Prime Minister of Canada.

Let us consider that suggestion a little more closely. Let the Social Credit Party consider this suggestion more closely. They will then realize that the federal government is far from being inflexible. Let us examine together, for a few minutes, all the concessions and changes made in respect of the federal Family Allowances Act and we will realize that the federal government has shown a great deal of flexibility in its dealings with the Quebec claims.

Quebec said: provincial legislation should have precedence in matters of social policy; the choice given to the provinces, according to the federal bill, will enable them to revamp the system so it will comply with the social priorities of the provinces.

Quebec said: the provinces should control the development of social policy, if not its administration. The choice given the provinces enables them to adjust the system to their own social policies.

Quebec said: the Constitution should provide a permanent guarantee of provincial priority in the field of social policy. The letter forwarded to Mr. Bourassa shows that we are ready to include such guarantees in a revised constitution.

Quebec said: the benefits provided for in the plan and the minimum income should escalate with the increase in prices and wages. The federal bill provides for the periodical readjustment of the maximums and the benefits, by means of Orders in Council, in keeping with the changes in price and wage levels.

Thus, some fifteen suggestions have been made which have been dealt with by the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, these are some instances which clearly show that we are not as inflexible as some people would have us. In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to say that federal-provincial relations could be improved. I think they could be better and that it is possible, amongst men of good will, to agree and, in particular, to find a solution to the Quebec problem.

I am in complete agreement with Mr. Castonguay when he says:

"The coherences needed to govern Quebec are not inconsistent with the coherences required to govern Canada."

When Mr. Castonguay says:

We fight for the right to establish our own priorities—

I reply: "You are right, and the federal government, far from refusing to recognize your claims, is ready to entertain them. Therefore, let us try to agree. This is what the people of Quebec, in particular, want and this is what the federal government is ready to do to better serve the citizens we represent at our respective levels."

Mr. Georges Valade (Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words in support of the motion which was introduced in the House today in order to call our attention to the problems which exist in federal-provincial relations, namely the trouble we have to agree on constitutional matters.