

Dominion-Provincial Relations

opposing this bill, if they were going to oppose it, on some other kind of grounds than those advanced by the hon. member for Edmonton West.

Mr. Lambert: Do you believe all you read?

Mr. Gordon: The hon. member asks me if I believe all I read. Naturally I do not, and I also do not believe everything I hear. It seemed to me that the hon. member was doing his very best at the last moment to produce some sort of case, but one which somehow or other seemed to me to fall rather flat. I was surprised at the terms of the amendment and at what the hon. member said, because he suggested it would be important to hold a federal-provincial conference to discuss the question of priorities before this bill was proceeded with.

It seemed to me he might have overlooked the fact that since April, 1963, there have been some 25 meetings of federal and provincial representatives, including five meetings of prime ministers and premiers which might be described as full-dress federal-provincial conferences. Two of these were held in 1963, in July and November. Three were held last year in March, September and October and another one will probably be called within the next several months.

I also wonder whether my hon. friend remembers that there was full agreement on the part of the federal and provincial governments with regard to the setting up of a tax structure committee. I would refer him to page 9074 of *Hansard* of October 15, 1964, where the terms of reference of that tax structure committee may be found. While I will not read the whole of the terms of reference I would draw his attention particularly to clauses 1 and 3. Clause 1 reads as follows:

The committee is directed by the federal-provincial conference to study and to report upon the following matters...:

1. Trends to be expected during 1967-72 in public expenditures by the federal government, the provinces and the municipalities, taking into account the broad priorities likely to be accorded by governments to expenditures on major programs that will compete for available funds.

As I remember, those words and terms were reasonably acceptable to the premier of the province to whom my hon. friend referred. He was a party to setting up this study which has been going ahead since, and on which many people are engaged fully. The third point in the terms of reference, which is again something to be studied and reported upon, reads as follows:

3. The general policy to be followed in respect of shared cost programs during the period 1967-72.

20220—791

I do not quite know what my hon. friend had in mind by suggesting that we call another conference to consider what the tax structure committee has been established to study, because that is essentially what he is suggesting. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, if this amendment were to pass and if we were to call a federal-provincial conference for the purposes suggested I would expect that the representatives of the provinces would be most surprised, to put it mildly. If their representatives turned up at all at such a conference it would seem to me they might well ask whether we planned to duplicate the work of the tax structure committee, inasmuch as they have already established a committee to do the very things that my hon. friend has been suggesting.

Mr. Nowlan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the minister is discussing a point of order and, if so, do you wish the point of order discussed at this time, or on the other hand is he going into the merits of the amendment? I would suggest with all due respect that is what he is discussing, and I suggest this is not the time or place for him to discuss the merits of the amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not the understanding of the Chair. I do not believe a point of order has been raised at all until now. I believe the minister was discussing the merits of the amendment, just as the hon. member before him did.

Mr. Nowlan: On what basis is he discussing the merits of the amendment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I did not notice that a point of order was brought up at any time during the course of the debate. I believe the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre posed perhaps a very indiscreet question when he suggested that possibly the amendment was not in order. The minister said then "I will come to this later", but at the moment he is doing what the hon. member for Medicine Hat and the hon. member for Roberval did, that is, considering the substance and the merits of the amendment itself.

Mr. Gordon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not detain my hon. friends very much longer with the remarks I am making. I wanted to conclude the point I was just making with regard to the strange suggestion that another federal-provincial conference should be called to consider work that a federal-provincial conference or a series of them have already been doing, work with