

[English]

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Madam Speaker, may I say to the House, and to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) in particular, that we in the official opposition view this bill with some suspicion and some approval. I may say that I think in the long run our goodwill and our good wishes have won out because, unless more information comes out in the debate, it certainly is not our intention to vote against the bill on second reading. However, I must be frank with the Prime Minister and the House.

I say to the Prime Minister that we view the bill with some suspicion for a number of reasons. First, if this is merely to create another \$60,000 deputy minister post, into which the Prime Minister is pushing a valued and experienced civil servant of this country in order to make way for an untried administrative friend of the Prime Minister in another position, then we do not like it.

● (1530)

One of the reasons why we feel we may have some grounds for that is the terminology used in the cabinet and by cabinet ministers when they speak of this bill. Do they refer to this bill as the dominion-provincial relations bill? No. Do they refer to this bill as the Robertson bill? No. It is referred to by the cabinet ministers themselves when they talk about it as the Pitfield bill. That cannot help but raise some suspicion in our minds that perhaps this is merely a vehicle to create a vacancy where a vacancy does not now exist, so that that vacancy can be filled by someone else. May I merely say to the Prime Minister that previous administrations have had a far better record than his administration has had in the dominion-provincial relations field without the need for such a post.

May I just indicate that back in the days when I firmly believed that co-operative federalism was working, some of the following achievements took place. For instance, the Roads to Resources program was set up without this post; a forestry agreement was reached with full consultation between the government of the day and eight provinces; the Atlantic Provinces Power Development Act was achieved with full consultation with the provinces concerned; the Columbia River Agreement was achieved with consultation; a winter works program was achieved with full, meaningful and viable consultation between the municipalities and the provinces and the then federal government; a worthwhile educational capital building program was achieved with full consultation with the provinces; the Prairie Provinces Water Agreement was achieved; the Canadian Council of Resources Ministers was set up, and ARDA was set up.

These are examples of a government that not only talked about co-operative federalism but actually put it into practice. Those days were very fruitful. The Diefenbaker government went—and some, I know, will say “Hear, hear!”—and it was replaced by a Liberal government under the late Right hon. Mr. Pearson. The whole atmosphere, so far as consultation with the provinces is concerned, changed.

We have just heard now from the lips of the present Right hon. Prime Minister of the problem that exists with

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health insurance. May I say to the Prime Minister that with the best of intentions in the world, with the goodwill that then existed in this country in respect of such a far reaching measure, the Pearson Liberal administration blundered badly in respect of the procedure and the mechanics in setting up health insurance in this country. There were scars and schisms initiated at that time by a Liberal administration that even today have not been healed.

Even today we hear the words of the Prime Minister that we need still greater consultation in respect of improvements to the health insurance plan. He is right, of course, and we all hope and pray that these things will come about, but I am sure that the Prime Minister would not deny that some of us are skeptical and some of us are suspicious, because in those days that was a massive, unnecessary confrontation, not consultation, with the provinces.

Exactly the same situation happened with the Canada Pension Plan, a good, far reaching, necessary and needed concept in this country. But again the method of going about it by the then Liberal administration of Mr. Pearson was simply wrong.

I would say to you that in those days of the Pearson Liberal government, the old fabric of consultative federalism in this country fell apart. What is needed today? The Prime Minister told us today that a federal-provincial relations office is needed by his administration because he recognized the importance of the challenge of such an office. I could not agree with him more. There is certainly a need for the recognition by the government of the importance of the challenge of dominion-provincial relations.

Let me just go through some of the blustering and blundering history of dominion-provincial relations of the Prime Minister and this administration. They are not in any order of priority, they have just been picked at random in the few minutes I have had since I heard that this bill was coming before the House today. First is the milk subsidy. Without consulting the provinces in any way the government decided to phase out the 5 cents a quart milk subsidy which now has driven up the retail and consumer price of milk. There has been no consultation worthy of the name whatsoever.

Do we need something to improve these relations? We most certainly do. How about the LIP and OFY programs? Millions of dollars in LIP grants alone have been poured into communities, most of them, by the way, where Liberal members have been elected, without proper regard for community or provincial priorities. In some instances grants were provided for activities within a community where the majority of the people in that community did not want them. There was no consultation with provincial or municipal officials whatsoever.

How about the DREE grant program? Again, millions of dollars have been spent on regional development programs with little or no regard for the priorities of the provinces involved. This is not the way to run a federal system. There have to be consultative programs undertaken with these jurisdictions, which have just as much importance, if not more, than the federal government. As my leader said last June during the election campaign: