

[English]

Mr. Breau: Mr. Speaker, I was just trying to point out the differences of opinion that we get from a party like the NDP, depending on the issue with which we are dealing. One day they do not give a heck about the provinces; they have the dogma, the theology, the answer to everything—name it, and they believe in their ideology to solve all problems such as foreign ownership of the economy. But when we talk about an issue on which the provinces are a little firm, the NDP sides with the provinces. I do not see how a party like that can take such stands if it ever dreams of coming to power.

Mr. Rose: Not in your province.

Mr. Breau: You can bet on that. You won't have much support in my province.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to deal briefly with the comments made by the hon. member for Sainte-Marie (Mr. Valade) who spoke before the hon. member for Winnipeg-North (Mr. Orlikow). The hon. member for Sainte-Marie mentioned a press release issued after the Victoria Conference. He was trying to use that press release to show that the federal government's position on the constitutional debate was a rigid and inflexible one and that the right honourable Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) was an obstinate man who would not listen to anyone.

Mr. Speaker, had the hon. member taken time to read a little further he would have noted that it had been issued after the Victoria Conference jointly by all the participating governments. It was not a federal government release but a joint federal-provincial one which all the governments represented in Victoria had agreed to.

If the people attending a conference decide upon a joint release in which they state that in 8, 11, 12 or 50 days, they will give out an assessment of a situation, it seems to me they are free to do so, and the hon. member for Sainte-Marie cannot say that the federal government has prompted it.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Sainte-Marie said that the Prime Minister was inflexible. I should like to tell him that there is a difference between firmness and inflexibility, between firmness and weakness. The hon. member probably sees our leader as one who controls everything, as his own leader who says one thing in one place and another thing in another one or in the House, according to what he is expected to say.

The Prime Minister has been firm on the constitutional issue; he has listened to the provinces. He has not been inflexible, but firm as the Prime Minister of a country, the head of government ought to be, especially when the matters at hand concern ten provincial governments.

The hon. member quoted two examples of governments which he thought were perfect: those of Ontario and British Columbia. These are two fine governments indeed to quote as examples in the fields of constitution and national unity! Ontario is an economically centralization-oriented government and British Columbia, which opposed the equalization system, accepts moneys from the federal government for introducing bilingualism and simply puts them in its general education funds while

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neglecting to implement a program approved by the federal government.

These are two fine examples given by the member for Sainte-Marie, a member from Quebec, in the constitutional debate.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy tonight to take part in the debate on the motion of the hon. member for Roberval (Mr. Gauthier) on federal-provincial relations. This is an important subject and I commend the hon. member for drawing the attention of the House to it.

However, I cannot support his motion because I do not agree with this statement:

—the government's responsibility for the deterioration of federal-provincial relations—

If there is any.

I do not agree because generally speaking I feel that federal-provincial relations are better than ever.

There are many examples of federal-provincial agreements between the Department of Regional Economic Expansion and the provinces; I am thinking also of agreements with other departments, the new fiscal arrangements and the new equalization formula which has been accepted by all first ministers, or at least by the constitutional conference of last December. I think it is wrong in view of this to suggest that federal-provincial relations are worse than ever. On the contrary, perhaps they have never been better.

Mr. Speaker, on the question of federal-provincial relations, many Canadians and members of this House consider the federal government, in our political system, as being a mere tax collector who unconditionally distributes his money around to the provinces which have all the necessary ability to administer them better than would the federal authority.

Mr. Speaker, such is not my idea of the part the federal government has to play in our system, nor is it that of my party nor of the government. I support the government's contention that it can handle as efficiently the benefits related to social services and influence the direction of such services provided to Canadians.

I do not intend by these comments to undermine the provinces, because I have always supported them.

Various precedents show that it is not true that the federal government has prevented some provinces to reform their welfare systems. I can even give some examples. When New Brunswick introduced a municipal tax reform within a program aiming at providing equal social services for the people, such program was meeting the needs of the population of New Brunswick.

When he introduced legislation to this effect, Hon. Mr. Robichaud did not come to Ottawa. Nobody in Ottawa could have prevented him from acting. There was no godfather in Ottawa whose permission should have been sought before embarking on a social reform in New Brunswick. Mr. Robichaud decided upon it and implemented it. It is as simple as that.

[English]

The hon. member for Winnipeg North talked about the time when the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The-