

The Address—Mr. Basford

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Basford: Being determined to keep Canada independent we are on the other hand faced with the problem of keeping it together. One does not have to sit in this house very long to realize that we have a fantastically difficult country to govern. It is a country, unlike others, that has natural influences that pull us apart rather than together, and I refer not only to the present French speaking and English speaking controversy but to the natural economic and geographic influences in Canada. Because of these influences, Canadian governments and Canadian statesmen have had to deliberately and consciously work at national unity. We have had in some cases, almost by artificial means, to tie this country together. We have built railroads and air lines and highways. We have spent millions of dollars on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation purely as a means to try to explain one part of the country to another, and of trying to work against the natural influences that pull the country apart.

The Liberal party has played a major role in what can properly be called the struggle for national unity. Because of the diversity we have, federalism is obviously the best and only type of government for this country. Provincial governments, provincial premiers, have important functions and responsibilities and they must have the financial resources with which to carry on. The provincial premiers have obligations to protect their provincial rights and interests. It is indicated that the functions and responsibilities of the two levels of government are undergoing a change and that the divisions of responsibility are in some respects outdated and unclear. This government has endeavoured, wherever possible, to co-operate with provincial governments and to understand their problems. The speech from the throne undertakes to continue the series of federal-provincial conferences which have already achieved considerable progress in improving federal-provincial co-operation and in improving the lines of communication and consultation between Ottawa and the provincial governments.

I am, however, disturbed by one attitude which seems to be developing. I do not refer specifically or particularly to the premier of Quebec. I would remind you, Mr. Speaker, that I come from a province the premier of which at the last federal-provincial conference made the greatest demands on the federal treasury. It disturbs me that an attitude seems to be growing that the government of Canada and the parliament of Canada should be nothing more than a clearing house

for the collection and disbursement to the provinces of great sums of money, and that there is a provincial veto over all that we in this parliament try to do. There are matters which should be exclusively within provincial control. There are others which require co-operation between the two levels of government. But, I suggest, there are also national problems with which the government of Canada and the parliament of Canada must have the power and resources to deal. This parliament cannot be allowed to become simply the rubber stamp for ten provincial premiers. I can assure them that the people of this country look to us in this parliament to solve some of the problems besetting Canada. We must be free, I suggest, to enact solutions.

One of these problems is, of course, the question of national unity itself. We must be free and able to propose solutions aimed at keeping this country together. One of the influences which divide us is, of course, the French speaking-English speaking controversy. I am from British Columbia and happen to be an English Anglican. I am proud of my heritage and the history of my people and their contribution to this country. My hon. friend from Longueuil and his French speaking compatriots are naturally and properly proud of their heritage, their history and the contributions their people have made and are making to Canada. There are those who have come to Canada with other heritages from countries in Europe, Asia and Africa who are also properly proud of their history and who wish to play their part usefully in the development of Canada. Surely this sort of pride is natural and proper, but it seems that this very pride is also dividing and separating us.

I hope that none of us come here to take part in the breaking up of a nation. Let us make no mistake; if the province of Quebec were to separate, other parts and regions of Canada would not be long in following. Surely, Mr. Speaker, irrespective of our origins we can also have pride in Canada, pride in the 96 years of nation building which has gone before, and pride in the future that can lie ahead for Canada. Surely we are not going to throw away past efforts, throw away the future that can belong to all of us, because we refuse to be tolerant, because we refuse to try to understand each other, because we refuse to try to communicate and work out ways of working with each other.

Some members of this house, unfortunately I suggest, try to take advantage of this present controversy by stirring up anger and suspicion for their own narrow political advantage. Surely each of us must be dedicated and committed to the purpose of being a

[Mr. Basford.]