

*Federal-Provincial Relations*

We have seen the beginning of this in the enlargement of the family allowance program. Consultation is now going on in the area of health and welfare to work out an approach to social policies that would be handled by the federal government and delivered by the provincial governments in ways in which they want to deliver them. However, there is still confusion over jurisdiction, and increasing political rivalry in promoting larger social benefits. We have seen this as one of the characteristics of the governmental jungle in which we live. That is why integrated economic-social planning between the federal and provincial governments is imperative to prevent the escalation of universal benefits into a welfare state. In the process of promoting flexibility via decentralization, I insist on a basic principle of social justice, namely, maximum benefits for the unemployable and maximum opportunity for the employable.

In considering ways to decentralize, it should be reaffirmed that the federal parliament must retain the primary responsibility for general economic policy in the country. Thus decentralization does not rule out centralization in primary areas. The federal parliament must have sufficient economic powers to regulate and influence the economy.

However, in fulfilling this constitutional responsibility of centralization, the federal government should explore more ways of decentralizing its operation so that federal policies can be regionally adapted. I have just given these brief references to constitutional division of power because that is the area that was opened up this afternoon by the Prime Minister in presenting a bill which provides a structure for a new set of relations between Ottawa and the provinces. Again I say that I cannot underline strongly enough how important it is that those negotiations that will lead to constitutional reform, and the whole approach to relations between the federal and provincial governments, be carried on in an open way and in a way in which Members of Parliament have access to them.

I come now to the question of decentralizing federal government departments. Surely this is tied to the question of how to have better federal-provincial relationships. We know that a certain amount of decentralizing of federal government departments is going on now. The Minister of Regional Economic Expansion referred the other day to the successful implementation of the 30-70 plan, by which the proportion of officials in his department who are located in Ottawa and those located in the field had been reversed from the previous proportion of 70 in Ottawa and 30 in the field, to 30 in Ottawa and 70 in the field.

● (1640)

I hope some time later to enter into the debate on this specific point. I will not speak more on it except to point out that when we look at the small number of civil servants who were affected by that move, when we look at the matter of decentralization in terms of relocating certain individuals from Ottawa to the provinces, we find that that is not the answer in the sense that the constitutional committee viewed it. The sense in which they viewed it was to decentralize not just some officials or bureaucrats but to decentralize the decision making process in the areas to which I have referred.

[Mr. Roche.]

That is the direction in which we should move, and if indeed this bill creates the vehicle to move us in that direction, then I should like to get the views of the man who will occupy that sensitive position. Decentralizing is far more than redistributing a handful of civil servants. The Joint Committee on the Constitution said:

Most Crown corporations could have their headquarters outside Ottawa, as many already have. Federal departments like Agriculture, Energy, Mines and Resources, Environment, National Defence and Transport could have their principal offices elsewhere, and many other departments could give their regional offices more authority. Even when Ottawa must remain the effective centre of administration, a greater effort can be made to encourage regional input.

Certainly special attention should be given in this case to the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, as I mentioned, and also to the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce through which there can be expressed joint federal-provincial identification of development opportunities in each province.

Now we come to the question of the Western Economic Opportunities Conference, which was itself a vehicle of federal-provincial relations that bypassed members of parliament. The development strategy of each province, particularly the kind of strategies that were highlighted at the Western Economic Opportunities Conference, should be reinforced by federal programs, which means federal officials in regions empowered to make decisions.

The western premiers at that conference called for the establishment of industrial centres of excellence throughout the various regions of Canada. These centres would be based on natural and human resources, supported by research and marketing assistance, to develop a vital economic unit capable of serving national and international markets. They said:

Such a program concept suggests clear initiative on the part of the federal government in the establishment of new centres of industrial activity in Canada. It would involve decentralization of the technical expertise of Industry, Trade and Commerce to plan and support the development of such centres, and the major funding of research activities and new industrial enterprise in co-operation with other departments of the federal government.

Again we see the importance of the federal government permitting the provincial governments and various local organizations to participate in the planning of broad economic development policies, in establishing regional industrial priorities, and in the development and implementation of programs. There should be, in short, decentralization of planning and technical skills, decentralization of decision making power on assistance programs, and strengthening of regional offices.

I have dealt with two of the three areas that I want to touch upon, first, the constitutional division of powers, and second, decentralization of federal governments, because they have such a bearing on the bill before us which sets up a secretaryship that will plunge into these questions.

Now I come to the question of intergovernmental relations. Surely if constitutional reform is the long range goal, and cannot be achieved overnight, then decentralizing of the administration, while attainable in the near future, still requires structural changes. What can be accomplished immediately is a new spirit of intergovern-