

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements

he made the point that the essential task of unity is a political task. It is a challenge and a responsibility to those of us who work in this profession to make institutions like the Parliament of Canada work as an agency which not only reflects the country but also allows it to move forward. In my judgment, and in the judgment of my colleagues here, we have important work to do to re-establish the strength and the capacity of our national institutions to command the attention and respect of the country.

I want to quote a western author, Wallace Stegner, who remarks in one of his works that "history is a pontoon bridge. Every man walks and works at its building end". That phrase, "the building end", describes a spirit we find uniquely on this continent. We have a place to build, and that sense of opportunity drew many of us and many of our ancestors here from more traditional places. That same spirit also provided the imagination and the energy to start great ventures and to dream large dreams. We have lost something of that sense in the last decade, when our political priority has been security rather than expansion. We have important programs of social justice and security in place now, and it is time for this country to begin again to build.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: It is time to remind Canadians of our unique opportunities and to provide them with the means and the encouragement to act. In some cases that requires incentives to allow those with resources to develop them; for others it means providing the jobs and training which provide a base for building. That capacity to build, to grow and to achieve one's own identity and to make one's own future is the promise and the nature of this country, and what we are discussing today in the legislation before us is part of the plumbing, part of the arrangements, which keep that kind of country in place. However, what we really must face in this parliament and elsewhere in the months to come is the larger question, not of the arrangements of the country but of the integrity of the country. We need to establish again a unifying sense of purpose, a sense which applies to building, a sense that there is more to Canada than simply conflicts over constitutions or tax points. This requires us, as members of parliament, to look upon other governments and members of other legislatures in the land not as adversaries but as partners. There has not been enough of that atmosphere of partnership in the country. Its absence has contributed to our present problems as a nation.

As I said at the beginning, we accept the arrangements which are before us, but we do not accept the atmosphere which has characterized the relations between the governments of this country for the last decade, arrangements of conflict, of confrontation and of controversy. If we are to retain the strength and the integrity of this nation, we believe that we must restore a sense of co-operation and of partnership, and it is to that purpose that we in this party are dedicated.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Clark.]

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I would like to thank my Conservative colleagues for their rousing round of applause as I got to my feet.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: We thought you were finished.

An hon. Member: You are deluding yourself again.

Mr. Broadbent: More than any other piece of legislation since parliament resumed last fall, this bill tells us what kind of Canada the Liberal party now believes in. I say this because the subjects involved—cost sharing for post secondary education, medicare, hospitalization and equalization—go to the very roots of the federal system, and I for one would have liked to have heard what the official opposition had to say on precisely these topics.

I listened with considerable care and no mean interest to see if the specific proposals which really do deal with fundamental questions which are found in this bill were going to get the endorsement or criticism of the official opposition, but I certainly heard nothing in that regard today. They are the fundamental aspects of a fundamental statement that we are dealing with, and they are at the core of this bill. They tell us something basically important about the government. Does it really believe that a woman working in a fish plant in Newfoundland, for example, has full equality in terms of certain aspects of life when compared to a bank clerk in Toronto or a rigger at some oil well in Alberta? I say this is what is involved precisely because the expectation for the lives of families in all these three areas and indeed throughout Canada, will be significantly determined by the capacities of the provincial governments concerned to provide for medical and hospital services, education, and other direct services dependent upon provincial revenues, all of which are determined by this bill for years to come.

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A Canadian government believing in justice must work constantly to achieve equality of condition in certain major aspects of life. Without it, not only is our sense of fairness offended but also our commitment to nationhood in a federal society falters. Regional inequities in such matters are not only unjust, they produce disunity.

This morning the minister described the bill as a "latter day evolution" of our system of transfer payments. This bill does not represent evolution at all. It is the first major step toward the balkanization of our country; it is a step backward in history which may do us all untold damage in the years ahead.

Before elaborating on this point, I want to say something about the position the provincial premiers took on this set of proposals. Contrary to what the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has told us, and contrary to what the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) suggested, the financial conditions established by this bill were not agreeable to the provinces. Speaking on their behalf at the meeting of the first ministers on December 14, 1976, Premier Lougheed said, and I quote from the official transcript of the meeting which, of course,