

• (2120)

Mr. Allen B. Sulatycky (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I wish to make only a few brief and perhaps disjointed remarks in this important debate. It is important and appropriate that this debate take place at this particular time because in the last few days the very basis of confederation has been challenged. I refer to three particular elements: the idea of equalization payments, the concept of an accommodation between the two major language groups in the country, and some question has been raised about the value of the government's new multicultural policy. It strikes me that if we challenge these factors in our national existence we are really challenging the idea of confederation itself. Therefore, I say it is appropriate for this House to be debating questions relating to equalization payments and federal-provincial fiscal arrangements.

In 1924 Vincent Massey, who later became Governor General of Canada, said:

This country is much more than a chain of wheat fields, and gold mines, and pulp-wood forests; it is more even than the union of nine separate provinces: it is the expression of certain ideas.

I have never seen a better definition of Canada. Many people have tried to describe Canada and to define Canadian identity. No one has really succeeded as well as Vincent Massey did in these few words almost 50 years ago. The idea that is embodied in Canada could, I suppose, be described as a great experiment in the evolution of a truly co-operative and tolerant society, a society in which we can co-exist with other people who share many things with us but who may have a different language, a different religion, and in which we throw open our doors to the world and allow newcomers to retain that from their past which they value, and even allow them to retain their former language, to a greater extent than is possible anywhere else in the world.

I think that if you look at Canada in any other way you would have to conclude that it is certainly not a feasible state. For example, there is no nation other than the USSR which is spread over such a large area, east and west, north and south, or encompasses as many diverse geographic areas with as inhospitable a climate as we have and with the population strung out in a narrow belt. If we were to look at this sensibly we would conclude that the best thing we could do is join the great nation to our south. That would make the greatest economic sense to many people. If we had done that some time ago we would probably all be better off today in an economic sense. However, that is not what happened.

The people who embarked on this venture called confederation did so because they wished to resist absorption by the United States. They wished to attempt a different kind of society on the northern half of this continent, a society in which two peoples attempt to live together in unity and harmony and who invite the rest of the world to come in and join them in this great experiment. In order for this experiment to survive, Mr. Speaker, it strikes me that we must have an inordinate amount of co-operation among the various regions in the nation, and indeed among the inhabitants of the nation. That is what equalization payments are all about. It is really people helping

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people, the people who are more fortunate helping those who are less fortunate.

I happen to come from an area which has been blessed with great natural resources and which at the moment has perhaps a stronger economy than most other areas of the country. I speak of the province of Alberta. I am sure I speak for most Albertans when I say that we are happy to be able to help Canadians who are less fortunate in other parts of Canada and we will be happy to do so for many years to come.

I believe that the hon. member for Kamloops-Cariboo (Mr. Marchand) was speaking for the majority of British Columbians when he expressed his sentiments earlier this evening. He expressed confidence that if at some time in the future the province of British Columbia became less fortunate, other parts of Canada would take up the slack and help the people in that part of the country to maintain a reasonable standard of public service and a reasonable standard of existence.

At the moment, most of the federal payments made to provinces are going to the five most easterly provinces. I am confident that that will not continue for very long because one cannot help being impressed by the tremendous potential which exists in those provinces. The mere fact that they are all bordered by the ocean in itself makes them an important part of the country, because in the future the oceans will play as great or a greater role than do the land masses of the world. The fact that Canada has the longest coastline in the world and that five of our eastern provinces are on salt water augurs well for this country. I believe that Albertans, citizens of British Columbia and citizens of Ontario when they, in effect, invest in those areas are making a good investment.

But as I indicated earlier, there are those who suggest that there is something insidious about equalization payments and say that we should not make them.

• (2130)

Mr. Alexander: Where did you ever hear that?

Mr. Sulatycky: I have also heard from many people that we should devote a greater amount of our gross national product to foreign aid. It strikes me as being totally inconsistent to talk of providing 1 per cent or 2 per cent of our gross national product to underdeveloped countries and then quibble about using 1 per cent of the gross national product for distribution to the have-not provinces within our borders.

It seems that equalization is accepted in football circles but it is not accepted universally when it comes to supporting our country. For many years the Canadian Football League has had a system where the teams that draw the largest crowds help support others like Regina, Winnipeg, Edmonton or Calgary, and no one quibbles about that. As a matter of fact, without a system of gate equalization it is highly unlikely that the Canadian Football League would exist.

Mr. Skoberg: That is Saskatchewan—in Regina?

Mr. Sulatycky: As an expatriate of Saskatchewan, I stand corrected. I simply use this to illustrate that because of the nature of our country we have to help those areas which are not, at the time in question, able to help them-