

*Federal-Provincial Relations*

● (1520)

[English]

The problems of today encompass a broad range of government activity and demand greater and more effective consultation between federal and provincial governments. In this context I hardly need to refer to such important joint undertakings as the federal-provincial review of the Canadian social security system which should, we trust, result in a beneficial rationalization of federal and provincial programs in the area of income support. I would mention also tri-level consultation at the federal, provincial and municipal levels, in order to co-ordinate the over-all public sector impact on our burgeoning cities. This provides another example of important and fruitful federal-provincial contact.

Furthermore, governments are at present grappling with questions which abound both in technical difficulties and practical constraints. They are faced with the complex issue of the sharing of fiscal revenue; they are attempting to adjust equalization payments structures in a climate of changing realities and external pressures; and in the resources sector the federal and provincial governments are determined to find solutions to the arduous question of the appropriate revenue split among both orders of government and industry. This very day several questions were addressed to me on that very subject by the hon. member for Calgary South (Mr. Bawden).

So, as I indicated on October 2, there remains the major challenge of patriating the constitution to provide Canadians with a constitutional framework which is truly their own. It will be recalled that in 1968 the government took the important step of establishing a special federal-provincial relations division within the Privy Council office to assist in the co-ordination of the government's approaches to federal-provincial affairs. This division of the Privy Council office has, over the years, provided the government with increasingly effective and wide-ranging support in the area of federal-provincial relations.

What is now proposed, in view of the growing complexity of the federal-provincial system, is a further step in the same direction. In this sense no major organizational change is envisaged because I do not believe the interests of the federal government would be served by a radical administrative innovation in this regard. I know some provincial governments have established a minister in a specific department for federal-provincial relations. This is not the course I am proposing, nor the course which is proposed by this bill.

What parliament is being asked to approve in this bill would, however, enable the government to raise the level of its capabilities as regards federal-provincial co-ordination without actually creating a new department. The office would continue answering to the Prime Minister as the cabinet secretary does.

I envisage a number of objectives for the federal-provincial relations office. First, it would assist in developing federal-provincial consultation on an increasing range of fronts; second, it would provide cabinet with greater assistance in examining federal-provincial issues of current and long-term concern; third, it would assist me as Prime Minister in my over-all responsibility for federal-

[Mr. Trudeau.]

provincial relations. Finally, it would provide assistance to federal departments whenever they deal with provincial ministers and their agencies.

I already announced, I believe two months ago, who would be the new occupant of the post of secretary to the cabinet for federal-provincial relations. The designation of Mr. Gordon Robertson as the government's choice to fill the new position has given the strongest possible indication of the importance we attach to the new position and to the work of the office which he will lead. Gordon Robertson has had a remarkable career in the public service up to now. His sensitive leadership as Deputy Minister of Northern Affairs in the formative years of that department is well known to hon. members in all parts of the House. His service as Clerk to the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet over the past more than 11 years, which is longer than any other person has served in that function, has earned him the justified reputation of being the outstanding public servant of them all.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

**Mr. Trudeau:** His assignment to this new post will give the country a new benefit from his exceptional talents and great personal integrity. He will be able to devote his energy particularly to developing our Canadian federalism and to the unity of our nation. As Prime Minister I will continue to have the advantage of having him close to me as a wise adviser of whom all the nation may be proud.

In support of the over-all cabinet system of government, my officials in the Privy Council office and the federal-provincial relations office will continue to provide services to ministers in an effective, efficient and co-operative manner. In carrying out their functions I have no doubt the two offices will be fully cognizant of their mutual interdependence.

Technically, it has been observed that the government could have achieved the establishment of this new body through the means of a legislative item in the Privy Council estimates. The House Leader (Mr. Sharp) and myself did consult and ask for views on this. However, we chose the present course of a bill, because there is every intention that the federal-provincial relations office should be a continuing and permanent structure. The government considers it more in accord with desirable parliamentary practice to have a bill directly amending section 38 of the Public Service Employment Act.

[Translation]

Since the Bill relates to the public service employment act, Madam Speaker, it seemed desirable to bring the reference to the "clerk of the Privy Council" up-to-date.

Since 1940, the incumbents of this position have had the title of "Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet", in fact if not in law. That is why, since we were considering amending the act, we thought it would be appropriate to introduce at the same time an amendment aimed at giving the incumbent of this position the title he has in fact and should have in law.

I would hope, Madam Speaker, that this bill would receive full and rapid consideration so the administrative change it embodies could come into effect as soon as possible.