

*Dominion-Provincial Relations*

as it is possible to reconvene the dominion-provincial conference—as I said in my remarks several days ago—so as to seek fiscal settlements.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Mr. Chairman, when you recognized the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre I rose at precisely the same time to ask, or to repeat, in my own words, precisely the same question I asked last night, which was one question to which the minister did not reply when he spoke on second reading. I suppose that in a sense what I am going to say could be regarded as repetition but I am going to take up the point which the minister has just made with respect to this suggestion of repudiation. That, sir, does not arise at all. There is obviously no possibility of this government, without a majority, repudiating—which could only be done by statute—what is enacted by statute.

However, we are now dealing with what exists at this time, not what existed before Saturday or the different situation which existed on Monday; we are dealing with the new proposals which the government has made. That is what is before this house and there is nothing whatever to compel the government, because Mr. Harris made an equalization on a particular basis, to follow Mr. Harris' pattern in this additional aid which the government says is necessary. They could have used a different formula if they had had one to use or, perhaps, if they had had a different formula which they would have dared to proclaim publicly before an election.

**Mr. Lesage:** That is right.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Of course the Minister of Finance cannot tell us; for it is only the Prime Minister who can commit his party, and we know something about even his commitments, but I say the only person who can tell us whether or not this principle of equalization on the basis of the two top provinces in this sharing as to revenue will be continued or something better will be done for the poorer provinces—and I stress that, something better for the poorer provinces—and put in its place, is the Prime Minister, or the Minister of Finance if he is speaking for the government as a whole. I said last night, and I repeat, that this is a grim and serious matter to the people who live in seven or eight provinces of this country, who are those most affected. I say we have a right to know in this house and that the public has a right to know whether or not the principle of equalization, which means a great deal more to the people of

[Mr. Fleming.]

the Atlantic provinces than do these additional grants,—welcome though they are—will be continued. I say this because of course the Atlantic provinces receive at least twice as much under equalization as they will under these grants. Equalization is much more important to the Atlantic provinces, and it is more important to the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, and it is palpably more important to British Columbia than this little hand-out which was cut in two by the minister after he discovered he had made a mistake in arithmetic. The people of all these provinces—and even the province of Quebec, because we were told that half of this \$18 million is equalization to the people of Quebec—

**Mr. Lesage:** Practically half.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Or practically half. I say this is the most important thing in this whole measure. Therefore, the people should know and not be asked to vote blindly. They should know what they are voting for.

The minister has refused to answer the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and so I am sure he will not answer me but, I make him this offer. If he will answer categorically “Yes” to my question I will sit down and I will not say anything more in this debate.

**Mr. Hamilton (Qu'Appelle):** That is a terrific temptation.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** I can understand that it must be a temptation to the minister because somehow I do not think he cares too much for the sound of my voice.

**Mr. Bell (Carleton):** He and 263 other people in this house.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** The hon. member for Carleton can speak for himself. I must say I rather care for his voice and I wish we could hear from him more often in this house because most of his interventions, up to now, have been rather helpful to us.

I do not, however, want to be distracted by these pleasantries or by the sense of humour of the minister; I want to get back to this grim point. If the minister will tell us right now that it is the policy of the Conservative party to continue equalization on a basis at least as good as that of Mr. Harris' formula for all the provinces, or that the government will do something even better, such as was asked for by Premier Campbell, I will sit down right now. If the minister is not prepared to do that I intend to make one other observation.

**Mr. Fleming:** Mr. Chairman, we have done better and we are quite content to be judged on what we have done.