

*Dominion-Provincial Conference*

thinking, quite a justifiable interest in eliminating regional disparity, the gap between the rich and the poorer provinces of Canada. The province of Nova Scotia particularly, wanted the principle of the elimination of disparity and the narrowing of the gap in regional equality enshrined in the constitution. We are moving toward a discussion of that point of view. Within that ambit also, considerable progress was made and, I think, considerable satisfaction given to the premiers of the four Atlantic provinces.

Finally, on the provinces' minds was a feeling that there had been insufficient consultation on the part of the federal government in its initiation of some shared cost programs and in its withdrawal from others. I will not go into the merits of that; the Prime Minister has dealt with it and we dealt with it at the conference. I want to say that the arguments came forth strong and clear, and without going into them, I would just remind the provinces that participatory federalism—a term used by Premier Robarts—is a two way street. Certainly, those provinces with a larger fiscal leverage than the others should be expected to have it operate in reciprocal ways, if this principle is to be followed.

I think that the constitutional conference saw a frank and very useful discussion of the constitutional review process and of some of the major issues involved in that review. I concede that any analysis of what was achieved at the conference made from such close proximity in time can only be rather subjective. I may say, however, that a real degree of movement in the process of constitutional review was achieved and a number of matters were designated as having priority. Talks are now to continue and to commence at the ministerial rather than merely the official level. All the governments agreed that ministers should now be responsible for a closer supervision of the course of discussion, and to my mind that denotes progress. I think also there was a general feeling that the constitutional review had to proceed at an accelerated pace. This feeling came both from the provinces which do not feel that major changes are needed to the constitution now but that we should build on the base which already exists, and from the provinces which feel we should entirely rewrite the constitution. This desire to advance the process will, I believe, make detailed discussion easier and enable us to show some real progress in a number of key areas.

[Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton.)

● (4:20 p.m.)

I wish to talk briefly about bilingualism or language as it was dealt with at the conference. Because of the attitude of the four western provinces toward the official languages bill, Bill C-120, a good deal of attention was focused on this subject. There was also a briefer discussion about the possibility of entrenching certain language guarantees in the constitution. We stated that the government was committed in principle to the bill. We believe that equal access in certain regions of the country to federal services of government is essential to national unity and that Canadians are entitled to use their own language and to feel at home in all parts of Canada. We hope this would contribute to the greater mobility of French-speaking Canadians across the country.

We believe that law is necessary in order to convert symbolism into reality. Many provinces feel that because of the goodwill which is now apparent in Canada, and the progress which has been made, an official languages bill would, by its enactment, make progress more difficult. I should like to say that rights can only be recognized by law, and no amount of goodwill can substitute for that. So, we hope we shall be able to proceed with the bill. I believe the bill when enacted will be evidence of good faith on the part of the English-speaking majority in Canada and of the French-speaking majority in Quebec.

I shall not repeat the constitutional arguments because they were made ably in this house earlier this afternoon by the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan). We believe this bill does not constitute an amendment to the British North America Act with regard to the use or extension of the French or English languages. It does not offend section 133, because that is not a limiting section; if it were it would limit the extension of the English language as well, and that would be an absurdity.

It was agreed at the conference in connection with the official languages bill that I should meet with the attorneys-general of those provinces which wanted to discuss the constitutionality of the measure, or certain sections of it. We have been in touch with those attorneys-general and on Monday in Victoria at 11 a.m. I shall meet the attorneys-general of the four western provinces.

**An hon. Member:** Pretty cold out there.

**Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):** Premier Bennett assures me there are tulips growing