

*Dominion-Provincial Conference*

rights. I regret that the conference did not reach any real agreement on this matter. I regret there was no agreement of a general nature. Surely we are not going to consider any opting-in program as a satisfactory solution in this area.

At the conference there was no serious coming to grips with problems such as the division of powers, the use of federal spending powers, and operations of provinces outside the country. I was sorry to see this last matter was not discussed seriously because I think there is a continuing danger that isolated events may escalate the heat of the current controversy. I had hoped the matter would be seriously discussed by the Prime Minister and the heads of all provincial governments with a view to reaching solutions in a rational atmosphere. It is best to discuss the matter when there is no particularly strong controversy in the air. We should not wait to discuss it until events overtake us willy-nilly and we are in the midst of a controversy.

The conference recognized that there are difficult problems facing the country in terms of living together, but it did not deal with them seriously. There was not much progress in areas involving linguistic and basic human rights. We must not hide from ourselves the importance of coming to grips with some of the many fundamental and difficult problems facing this country. We must really come to grips with them and with problems relating to federal spending powers and the general division of powers.

For two reasons I have dealt with the atmosphere in which the conference met and with the importance provincial premiers attach to their day to day and month to month dealings with government. First, the discussion of these relationships took so much time that not much time was left for an in-depth discussion of the country's constitutional problems. That was one unfortunate result of the prevailing atmosphere. Second, because of the existing atmosphere, when constitutional matters were discussed the provincial premiers could not give them their undivided attention. Short-term difficulties, if one cares to call them that, were constantly on their minds and affected their handling of subjects at the conference. Therefore they could not devote their deepest attention to questions involving constitutional matters. Certainly it is of the utmost importance to avoid this sort of atmosphere in future. In this way, when the federal government and the provinces set up machinery for consultation there can be a

realistic discussion of priorities before the next federal budget is introduced and before the provincial budgets of 1970-71 are introduced. Most of the matters of short-term importance discussed during the conference can be dealt with.

● (12:50 p.m.)

I hope the Prime Minister and his colleagues will not cut existing cost-sharing programs or, on the other hand, commence new cost-sharing programs without serious and meaningful consultations with the provinces. Under the circumstances it was inevitable much time would be spent discussing the grievances of the provinces and the manner in which the federal government had exercised its spending power. I express the hope that, whatever difficulties we may have with our constitution, constitutional discussions in the future will not be hampered by feelings of distrust or bad feelings that may arise from poor federal-provincial relations in other areas. It is important that there be progress.

The government or the province of Quebec served notice that the next time it wanted serious discussion on some of the matters it considered basic. I say that these problems will not be solved by confrontation nor will they be solved if we adopt a rigid conception of the constitution. The constitution we develop must be related to Canada as it is. It is not good government to try to put Canada into some abstract conception. It is necessary and vital that any constitutional changes to be devised enable us to live and work together.

When these changes are discussed, whether it be in the house, in a committee, in the federal-provincial conference or in other places in the country, we will keep in mind the good advice given by the Premier of Nova Scotia at the conference that we have to be prepared to pay a certain price for confederation. If I have a definite idea which is divisive I will not attempt to force this idea on others. We all have to be prepared to pay a certain price for confederation. We must be prepared to make a serious and continuing effort involving genuine reconciliation and confrontation.

This is one of the reasons we are suggesting a parliamentary committee be established. There are many questions now being discussed concerning the powers of government, the powers of parliament, the relationship between the two houses of parliament, the proposal to put in writing some of the conventions which govern parliament and the