

[Translation]

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. member for Bellechasse rise on the order now before us, i.e. the motion for third reading of Bill C-8?

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: I believe there has been a misunderstanding. I do not think the hon. member for Bellechasse understood that we had proceeded to orders of the day. It might be unfair to the hon. member not to allow him to make his speech. Perhaps with the indulgence of the House I might be allowed to recognize the hon. member.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker: I believe the hon. member should be allowed to make his speech. I was under the impression that he had not realized that we have reached the orders of the day, on the third reading of Bill C-8.

With permission of the House, the hon. member will be allowed to make his speech, after which the motion will be put. Does the House agree?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, first I wish to apologize. I usually follow attentively the business of the House but at the call of the orders of the day, I was consulting my colleagues and just at that moment you called the order for third reading of the bill.

I do thank the Chair and all my colleagues for giving me this opportunity of making comments on third reading of Bill C-8.

This bill is to authorize equalization payments to provinces, out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund, for the period from April 1, 1972 to March 31, 1977 and also to amend the Established Programs (Interim Arrangements) Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian confederation has existed since 1867. It was on that year that our constitution was drafted and it has been the subject of discussion ever since. All governments, whatever the parties in power, in Ottawa as well as in Quebec, have accused one another of violating The British North America Act and, in most cases, it had to do with sections dealing with sources of revenue. Yet the Confederation charter clearly established the powers, jurisdictions and responsibilities of the different levels of government.

Section 91 for instance defines the powers and responsibilities of the Canadian Parliament. I do not need to recall here section 91 as it has been often quoted in this House and all Canadians should know about the constitution of their own country.

Section 92 defines the exclusive powers of provincial legislatures and section 93 gives every province the power to legislate in matters of education.

Federal-Provincial Arrangements Act

I should like to deal briefly with this aspect of section 92 providing for certain responsibilities and certain powers in the case of provincial legislatures.

Since 1867, the central administration has always shown a tendency to increase centralization in various fields and this, whatever the party in power. This tendency is quite natural because the Canadian Parliament is responsible for the whole Canadian territory and since it sees the problems at the national level it is natural for the central government to interfere from time to time in provincial fields of jurisdiction.

This centralization increased in wartime and mainly during the 1939-45 war—the war of which like most members I have been more specially aware—while in the name of Christendom and civilization the central government took over some sources of revenue which belonged exclusively to the provinces and which were to be handed back at the end of the war.

However, the war is over even though no formal order has been signed to this effect; it seems that after 26 years the war should be officially over and we should enter a new phase.

Mr. Speaker, it has been repeated for a long time throughout the country that Quebec is not a province like the others. Quebec is different and even though the right hon. Louis St. Laurent, a former Prime Minister, once said that Quebec was no different from the other provinces, both the Canadian constitution and the Confederation charter recognized a marked difference to the effect that Quebec because of its special character and of its French culture is not like the other provinces. The Fathers of Confederation, at that time, clearly stated that difference by giving exclusive power to the provinces so that the people of Lower Canada could pursue their emancipation and live according to traditions and rights which had been recognized till then.

One will remember, Mr. Speaker, that at every federal-provincial conference, the former premier of the province of Quebec, the hon. Maurice Duplessis, suggested it was unconstitutional for the central government to levy taxes for purposes that do not come under its jurisdiction.

One will also remember that other premiers said the same thing afterwards regardless of their political affiliation, precisely to protect this aspect of the constitution and to have the rights of the province of Quebec respected.

One will also remember that Mr. Duplessis, by having the Quebec legislature pass legislation setting up provincial income tax took very positive action to assert in an unequivocal way the rights of the province of Quebec. That happened in the fifties. One will remember that at that time, a very serious conflict opposed the then premier of the province of Quebec and the right hon. Louis St. Laurent.

Hon. members will also remember the famous meeting between those two men in a Montreal hotel to discuss this problem and will recall that Mr. Duplessis won this constitutional battle when at that time the central government accepted to gradually give back to the province of Quebec its rights in the field of income tax.