

that it is better, that it is more effective, to try to work out agreement on the principles than to keep on bickering about the problem itself. Canadian unity, and federal-provincial co-operation, have been called in question too often for us to think that another temporary expedient will do. We must discuss the fundamental problems - the constitution which defines the framework of Canadian unity and sets the rules of federal-provincial co-operation.

I could recount, as you could, the progressive shifts in resources from the federal to the provincial governments, so that now the provincial-municipal share of total government revenues is approaching 50 per cent. I could recount the steady and progressive reduction in the federal share of income and estate taxes. I could recount the increases in federal equalization to the lower-income provinces, so that now they amount to well over half a billion dollars a year.

I could speak, too, of our concern (indeed, of the urgent necessity) for preventing an erosion of the economic and fiscal powers of the Parliament of Canada if our country is to remain strong; and the opportunities for Canadians are to increase in every region of the country.

But this is not my point. You know these arguments as well as you know your own on this central question of federalism. My point is that these arguments have been going on for so many years that we owe it to Canadians to try to get at the fundamental problem - and that problem is the constitution.

FEDERAL SPENDING POWER

If the provinces feel, for example, that successive Governments of Canada have been too ready to initiate shared-cost programmes, or that shared-cost programmes are a violation of the spirit of provincial jurisdiction, then we had better look at the constitutional power under which they are created - the federal spending power. Behind all of the arguments, is it being suggested that this federal power should be reduced or circumscribed in some way? Or is it being suggested that there should be some ground-rules for its use? These are fundamental questions indeed, for on this constitutional power are based, for instance, the Hospital Insurance Plan, the Canada Assistance Plan, the Fund for Rural Economic Development, the Health Resources Fund, Medicare, the Trans-Canada Highway and Family Allowances. The federal spending power also enabled the Federal Government to contribute to many centennial projects, including Expo 67. These are some of the ways in which Canadians benefit from this power and which we must keep in mind when we discuss this issue.

The use of the federal spending power is just one example of the basic constitutional questions which we must resolve in order to find enduring solutions to the continuing financial problems of all governments.

REGIONAL DISPARITIES

Another preoccupation of both federal and provincial governments has been the attempt to provide equal opportunities for Canadians in all regions. This was one of the underlying reasons for Confederation. During the century of our history, economic conditions and the resulting problems of inequality have changed beyond recognition. The question has been raised whether the constitution imposes sufficient obligations and grants sufficient powers to the various levels of government to solve these problems. We share the provinces' desire to find more equitable ways of distributing opportunities throughout Canada, and we welcome a full discussion of the best constitutional means of achieving this goal.

Rather than renewing the battles of the past, battles over immediate financial arrangements, I think we should face up to these fundamental issues. They are included on the agenda of the conference, and we shall be discussing them in the next three days. They should be considered as part of a systematic examination of the whole structure of our federal system.

HUMAN RIGHTS

We want to revise our constitution. We want to bring it up to date, to make it more in keeping with the new realities of our time. However, our real purpose, our profound motivation, is first and above all to serve the citizens, to safeguard his interests, to ensure the protection of his rights and the realization of his hopes....

What values can be more important, what possessions more precious to the citizen than the right to life and property, and the freedoms of opinion, speech and religion? Those are basic rights of the individual, inherent in the dignity of man, because they are fundamental, natural and, indeed, unalterable. Can these rights be ignored in the constitution of a modern and civilized country which claims to be the defender of the dignity and liberty of man?

The Federal Government insists that a charter of human rights should be an integral part of the constitution, because it believes that those rights are equally important for all Canadians....

There may be some who believe that this matter is rather one of provincial jurisdiction and are wary lest the Federal Government should intrude in a field not coming under its exclusive competence. There can, however, be no question here of Government encroachment, since it is not a matter of transferring legislative powers from one government to another. It is only necessary that we be in agreement to restrict the power of all the governments so that they will no longer be free to prevent the exercise of individual rights which we would all agree to guarantee. We are agreeing to place the basic rights of the citizen before those of the governments. Nothing more.