

*Dominion-Provincial Conference*

the government the importance of good workaday federal-provincial relations was a very important and worth-while aspect.

There is certainly dissatisfaction in varying degrees with the constitution that has served us since 1867. Perhaps there is—and I think this might be a positive result from the conference—more agreement now than previously on the need to update the constitution. The Prime Minister said that he wanted to know whether we favoured partial, piecemeal or general reform of the constitution. I have no hesitation in saying that it is certainly our view that we want a general review of the constitution. We realize that a good many of these things hang together. On the other hand, if we can make progress in a particular area I hope we would not hold that back until the whole job was completed. But certainly it would be our view that a general review of the constitution ought to be achieved. This does not necessarily mean rewriting every word in the constitution; certainly, it means a general review. I think the conference, perhaps made the need for this widely understood in the country as a whole. This is another dividend from the conference.

• (12:40 p.m.)

It is clear that the provincial representatives who came to Ottawa this time were not impelled by the urgency to work out revisions to the constitution. They were not so much incensed at anomalies or inequities in the present constitution, the British North America Act, as they were at the way in which the federal government has been exercising the federal power and interfering in provincial financial jurisdictions. The government of Quebec, which quite obviously placed great importance upon a far-reaching review of the constitution, was very much concerned about the way the government of Canada has been operating under the present constitution. That, I think, was unfortunate. That concern proved a real stumbling block and prevented us from moving ahead with the discussion of the longer term problems in connection with the constitution.

Provincial representatives referred to a number of subjects. The federal government was accused of imposing programs involving provincial jurisdiction on the provinces without holding prior meaningful consultations with the provinces. The provincial premiers were virtually unanimous in condemning the federal government for withdrawing from

[Mr. Stanfield.]

certain programs after it had got the provinces involved in them. Some pretty severe words were said about the 2 per cent social development tax and the changes proposed in the succession duty and gift tax fields. At the beginning of the conference the climate was affected by the bitterness that followed the last meeting of the ministers of finance. After that meeting provincial representatives went away feeling that the government of Canada was completely insensitive to their problems and that the federal government was willing to wage political warfare against them, just as the Prime Minister seemed content to wage political warfare against us this morning.

It is clear the government of Canada went to the conference just finished with the longer term problems of the country in mind. It was thinking in terms of constitutional reform. It is also clear that the provinces came carrying with them a brief from their taxpayers whom they felt were already overburdened.

No one can object if we send to committees matters which have been dealt with at previous conferences, matters involving various institutions, our concept of federalism and matters pertaining to the Supreme Court and Senate. The Prime Minister wanted views expressed on these institutions. Personally I believe that measures taken to increase the truly federal aspect of the Senate, if that is the correct term, which would strengthen the federal nature of the country would be sympathetically received by the people. I also hope that constructive measures will be taken to involve this chamber and the other chamber in discussions relating to these matters. We should be very happy, as individuals and party spokesmen, to give the Prime Minister our views in committee on questions he has raised.

The question of regional disparity has not yet been much illuminated, I must say, by the responsible minister. It now appears he is to produce some legislation next week, at which time he will make what he has promised will be a comprehensive statement. At this time I content myself with saying that we recognize the desirability of including in the constitution some provisions relating to economic disparity. I will judge the effectiveness of this government and the measure of its good intentions by the actual programs in this regard that it brings forward. We are waiting for them impatiently.

I have said that we seem to have slipped back on the subject of human rights. I am referring to the charter of individual human