

Dominion-Provincial Conference

perhaps more of an electoral manoeuvre than anything else, since it allowed the Minister of Justice to become the pretender to the then prime minister's crown and to set forth some electoral arguments on TV. But, Mr. Speaker, it is a matter of disappointment to see that after discussions that lasted for three days, the last constitutional conference did not make it possible to make fair decisions in order to enable provinces to discharge the responsibilities assigned to them by the Canadian constitution.

Of course, the dilettantism shown by the present Prime Minister has been one of the main obstacles to the success of this constitutional Conference. Almost all observers are unanimous, except of course some premiers whose political allegiance was stronger than the constitutional argument and who became the admirers of the Prime Minister.

On the whole, it can be said that this conference did not bring any solution to the most pressing and most urgent problems of our country. At first we expected the linguistic issue to be the main concern of the delegates but we quickly realized that the provinces had more pressing needs and that it was the monetary and financial problem. The question was whether the central government would keep its control over the powers and rights of the provinces, or whether it would realize that the provinces had their own needs and that they are faced with tragic situations.

We only need to read to-day and yesterday's papers to realize how tragic is the unemployment situation in the province of Quebec. We know that 40 per cent of the Canadian unemployed are found in that province.

At the present time the province of Quebec is faced with financial problems as serious as those of the Maritimes. In Quebec the unemployment rate reaches 8.9 per cent while it is over 10 per cent in the Maritimes. The province of Quebec should have not been made the centre of attention in this conference because it came to request from this federal government and to put before it the same problems which other provinces have stressed for so long. But the federal government turned a deaf ear.

This morning, the right hon. Prime Minister put questions to the members of the opposition and requested directions on a possible approach; may I too ask the right hon. Prime Minister some questions to which I invite him to reply.

[Mr. Valade.]

We should like the government and the right hon. Prime Minister to tell us whether future federal-provincial conferences will have the same structure as the last one? Are premiers only and members of elected political parties to be invited?

We want to know if the right hon. Prime Minister intends to always keep the upper hand?

We would like the Prime Minister and the present government to tell us whether they intend to control and to further intrude—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order, please. I regret I have to interrupt the hon. member but the time allocated to him has expired.

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Does the hon. member for Lotbinière wish to rise on a point of order?

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the house that the present debate was initiated by the right hon. Prime Minister. It is a very important and interesting debate. However, the time set aside for discussions was very short indeed. We could only listen to seven or eight hon. members, I would therefore express the wish that we might pursue.

I therefore move, seconded by the hon. member for Beauce (Mr. Rodrigue):

That this house will not adjourn at five (5) o'clock, pursuant to standing order, but that the debate will continue until six (6) o'clock.

In case this motion should be out of order or should not meet with unanimous approval, I would like Mr. Speaker, to ask the leader of the government to make some suggestions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order, please. The hon. member has risen on a point of order. May I remind him that it is out of order to move a motion of this kind at this stage?

Mr. Valade: Mr. Speaker, with the permission of the house, I could end my remarks in a few minutes.

Some hon. Members: No, no.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): Order, please. Unfortunately, we do not have the unanimous consent of the house.