

*Federal-Provincial Relations*

icant. Indeed, I am surprised that this question, important as it is to Canadian confederation, was not brought before the house earlier so that it could be given the careful consideration which the nature and importance of the matter deserves.

While the Minister of Finance has emphasized the fact that this is in the nature of an interim measure, the government of Canada has not enunciated or declared its policy, nor does it intend to at the moment. None the less the experience of the past has been that the things which have been interim and introduced as such have ultimately in many cases become the permanent course of action. Indeed, the pathways of experiment often become the highways of experience. For that reason this matter and its importance should have been discussed at very considerable length. Several of my colleagues would have dealt with the matter, to the end that the substantial changes inherent in the ideas which have been expressed by the government concerning some of the provinces receive the examination by parliament which would assure that what is being done here, when it is done, is to the advantage of Canada, and that it is strengthening rather than weakening confederation.

I want to have the assurance of the minister that in the event that this resolution is passed—and in order to preserve our rights we intend to pass it on division—no action will be taken by the federal government during the months intervening between the present and the resumption of debate and final decision on the matter by any of the provinces of Canada. In other words, what is done by the passage of this interim resolution is not to be considered as a determination made by the house.

We think that this matter is one on which there is widespread division of opinion. In outlining the circumstances of this matter the minister rather glossed over the situation. I think he did so intentionally so as to indicate that there are four or five arguments in favour of action being taken and that the position of the government, while not determined upon finally, might receive the support of this house; and then later on the membership of this house would be faced by an accomplished fact.

How far are we going to go in this direction? Are we, in accepting the generality of the idea of opting out, actually opting ourselves out of nationhood? This is a viewpoint which is being expressed in increasing measure. When this matter is placed alongside

certain other plans of the government, when one sees the changes that are taking place or are anticipated or expected, and in view of the leadership which this government has given in certain directions, there are many Canadians who are wondering whether or not this is one measure, when taken in conjunction with others, has not got as its purpose ominous portents for national unity.

I have before me an editorial which appeared in the *Vancouver Province* for October 2 last in which this view is set forth. The view of this newspaper is that the clock is being turned back. The editorial goes on to say:

The provinces want to opt out of shared revenues and shared responsibilities. If they are not careful they may arrive at a time when there is nothing left from which to opt out.

It concludes with these words:

If there is strength in unity it is, perhaps, ironical that just as Canada is about to commemorate its centennial the government should be passing legislation which may prove to be a major step toward the eventual disintegration of confederation.

That is a viewpoint which is being expressed across this nation.

We want to look carefully into this matter, Mr. Chairman. We want to make our position clear so that no one will misunderstand it, and that the fact we are considering today the passage of this resolution shall in no way be interpreted as approval of the course which this government has in mind. The aim and purpose of the fathers of confederation was to bring about a united nation. The fathers of confederation did not believe in a Canada of two nations. They did not accept the principle of a state within a state. They did not accept the principle that the provinces, or any of them, might become associate states. The principles of Macdonald and Cartier and of all succeeding prime ministers up to the present Prime Minister followed the course throughout the years which was in keeping with the abiding principle upon which confederation was built. The expression "The building of one Canada" is not a new one, nor is it a new thought. It was the aim and purpose of the fathers of confederation that we should indeed be one nation, with our constitutional rights assured, predicted and preserved. We in the Conservative party went further than did the Liberal government of 1945 to 1949 when we insisted that our constitutional rights must remain inviolate, and that they could not be changed excepting by unanimous agreement not only