

Dominion-Provincial Conference

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys): He hasn't got much of an act to follow.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

An hon. Member: Let it come from the heart.

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): I am afraid it has to come from the heart, Mr. Speaker. I do not think anything has happened since I came to Ottawa—and I speak with some emotion—which has discouraged me so much about the future of our country in so short a time as the speeches made by the Prime Minister.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: I am sorry if I seem to speak with some emotion. I am very disappointed. I have felt a great deal of concern during the past year about the tendency of the Prime Minister to approach certain great national problems in terms of confrontation rather than reconciliation. We have, unfortunately, seen a further example of that this morning.

It is my belief that in order to make progress, let alone solve the tremendous problems facing our country, we shall need the good will and the understanding of everybody in the country and especially of every member of this house. Whatever our contribution may be, we should be invited to make it. We should be presented with every opportunity to do so. I say in all sincerity that it is a tragedy for this country when the Prime Minister stands in this house and taunts the opposition, which is not serious in itself but serious only in the light of the subject involved.

I have always tried to approach the constitutional question with restraint and with responsibility. I have always felt strongly it ought not to be a partisan issue in the ordinary sense of the term. I have no intention of responding to the Prime Minister in kind, though I might enjoy doing so, as would my followers behind me.

In all seriousness, it is now the responsibility of those who sit in opposition to undo the damage which has been done by the Prime Minister.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Trudeau: They should have thought of that before they began interrupting me.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

[Mr. Trudeau.]

An hon. Member: Take your ball and go home.

Mr. Trudeau: Let your leader speak.

Mr. Stanfield: If the Prime Minister is suggesting he was provoked into making some thoughtless remarks which he would now like to withdraw, we would provide him with every opportunity to do so. But I was under the impression he was reading from a prepared speech.

Mr. Trudeau: I will withdraw if the questions asked during my speech are withdrawn.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stanfield: Come, gentlemen, let us try to get things back to a point from which we can have a reasonable discussion. I say in all sincerity we are not off to a very good start. I did not come here this morning to find fault with the conference.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stanfield: Hon. members opposite can laugh if they like. I hope any criticism I make will have some bearing on the future, not just on the past, and I hope that some of the things I say will at least be instructive to those who are prepared to listen. I believe it is my duty to talk frankly. I think it is the duty of all of us to talk frankly about these problems. I would be guilty if I were, on the one hand, to indulge in unnecessary or trifling criticism and, on the other hand, equally guilty if I were simply to gloss things over for the sake of keeping an appearance of peace in the country.

● (12:30 p.m.)

I recognize the great difficulties that are involved in the constitutional question. I do not think I have ever taken any position or said anything that was intended to deepen any difficulties in the country. I have no desire to minimize the difficulties that are involved or the difficulties that are facing the government which is charged with the responsibility of trying to ease the problem. On the other hand, it is certainly important that we recognize our difficulties and recognize them realistically. Certainly this is necessary for progress. It is no favour to the country to pretend that they do not exist. It is no favour to the country to sweep them under the rug or even to sweep them back into committees of officials. Certainly it is no favour to the country to oversimplify the problems. It would be a poor service to the country for us to do any of these things.