

Dominion-Provincial Relations

regard to which they have established a special committee to establish the subject in depth. I think that is the expression used these days.

In other words, I am inclined to think, and I say this with respect and in no unpleasant sense, that this proposal is something of non-sense. In the light of the very serious consideration that a series of federal-provincial conferences have already given to these questions, and in the light of the fact that they set up a tax structure committee to make what we hope will be the most comprehensive inquiry into these fields that has ever been undertaken, I suggest there would be no purpose in having another conference. I might remind my hon. friend that this study was received most enthusiastically by the premiers as well as by the representatives of the federal government, that it was recognized it would take a year or so to make such a study and that after discussion at these conferences it was fully understood that we would do something in the interim. That is what the bill sets out to do.

I think the hon. member for Digby-Annapolis-Kings (Mr. Nowlan) has raised a point which might perhaps have escaped me, namely that this amendment is not only grammatically unusual, if I may say so, but does not in any way oppose the principle of the bill. Therefore it would seem to me that at the appropriate time Your Honour will be considering very carefully whether the amendment is in order at all. I would suggest that it is not. If by any chance Your Honour should be persuaded—I cannot at the moment think of a stronger word—that for some reason or other we should consider this amendment, then those on this side of the house will vote against it.

Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Qu'Appelle): Mr. Speaker, in the opening remarks today of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Gordon) he challenged the house to accept the suggestion that with the new problems and situations in a federal state as large geographically and as modern as that which exists in Canada we have to search out for new policies and attitudes. He asked the house to look forward to the future without fear. He suggested we need more flexible and broader approaches than have been utilized in the past. It is to that suggestion that I wish to direct my main remarks.

The minister saw fit to rise in connection with the amendment on the grounds that there had been five conferences in the last

[Mr. Gordon.]

two years between the federal and the ten provincial governments, and that in addition there had been established a tax structure committee, and that therefore the amendment put forward was not necessary. I think this lends weight to the remarks I intend to make now.

Generally speaking, in federal-provincial conferences the assumption is that the federal government represents federal interests. That has not been the case in the last two years. There is an essential difference in this regard. In the past, perhaps in our naïveté, in nearly 100 years we have assumed that the government which all the people of Canada elected to carry out the national business would protect the interests of the federal government. With the constant confrontation that must be expected in a federal state, as between federal and provincial powers, one expects that the provincial governments will represent their points of view with all the vigour and astuteness at their command. Simultaneously, one expects that the federal government will represent its interests with all the vigour at its command.

Let me remind the house briefly what has been the history of the last 23 months. Hon. members will recall that when this government took office it immediately and without consultation with the provinces jumped into the provincial arena and as a result got a bloody nose. Not only Quebec, but other provinces objected with a result that the federal government not only retreated from these four main invasions into the provincial arena, but began to abandon position after position, which were traditional positions of federal power.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest this is what is causing the vague yet deep uneasiness in Canada today. This bill by itself is innocuous. As the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) stated, and I cannot recall his exact words, this is a sham and a delusion.

An hon. Member: Nonsense.

Mr. Hamilton: If the minister wishes to use the word "nonsense", I suggest he should use it in respect of this bill.

Let me state in respect of the suggestion that a tax structure committee will resolve this very vital problem of relationships in the federal and provincial governments, that men who tend to put their faith in these tax structure committees look upon everything purely from the narrow base of the tax dollars. It is time in the history of Canada that we look upon the relationships between