

more opinions expressed before I offer a suggestion. It is my intention to offer a resolution in general terms so as to suggest to the Dominion Government that our agricultural interests must be protected, and that certain things are required, and to ask the Dominion for such special provisions in regard to tariff as we think we require. We are not in a position, after having endorsed the scheme of the Government, and after having handed over the sole control of the Customs to Canada, to prescribe what tariff we shall have, or to impose conditions as to our local tariff.

Hon. Mr. ROBSON—Mr. Chairman, while I consider the question of tariff one of very great importance, it does not appear to me that it necessarily forms any part of the terms. It is, in my opinion, futile to imagine that we shall obtain power, under Confederation, to frame and regulate our own tariff. The Customs tariff is essentially a Federal measure, and the Dominion Government cannot very well permit a Province to make its own tariff. To do so would, in my opinion, be to admit a principle which would ultimately break up the whole Confederation. If such a concession were made to British Columbia every other Province in the Dominion would forthwith clamour for it. The Dominion tariff is of necessity a Federal matter, to be dealt with by the Federal Parliament, and it is unreasonable to expect that such an exception will be made in our favour. The Customs tariff is the main source of Federal revenue; and if any Province were permitted to tinker with it, the Federal revenue would, indeed, be precarious. History does not encourage us to hope for such a power. Taking the United States which, in this respect, presents conditions not dissimilar to those of the Dominion, we find that the Customs tariff has ever been a Federal question. To no State or Territory has it been conceded to deal with its own tariff. If the strongest reasons had not existed for this, we should certainly have found exceptions made in favour of Pacific States and Territories. Hon. Members will recollect the bitter complaints made in earlier times on this Coast against Federal tariffs; yet the people, while complaining, were never foolish enough to claim or expect the right to regulate their own tariff. They knew perfectly well that such a power was wholly incompatible with Union. It is as well that we should not cling to any such hope as that of being permitted to make and regulate our own tariff under Confederation. I quite concur with the Hon. the Chief Commissioner in the view that, notwithstanding the difference in existing conditions on this side of the continent, and on the Atlantic side of it, there are many questions, even of tariff, which would be more successfully dealt with at Ottawa, and that our representatives would be listened to, and would have their due weight upon such questions. Probably through their influence the tariff would, in some respects, be made more conformable to our circumstances and interests; but the Dominion tariff must be altered and maintained by the Federal Parliament, and not by any Provincial authority. We occupy a very exceptional position, and shall do so for years, in regard to such questions, and this might justify us in asserting that the tariff of Canada, as a whole, is not applicable to British Columbia at present. But, Sir, permit me to say that this question, like most others, has two sides to it, and has not been approached with that fairness and candour which its great importance demands. We are very apt to estimate protection above its real value—to forget the price we pay for it. Even our farmers sometimes pay more for protection than it is in reality worth to them. Under free trade the products of this part of the Colony commanded a much more ready market, and higher prices, than they do now after three years of protection. I am willing to admit that a few farmers have thriven, partly, perhaps, on protection, but partly, too, I am apt to think, at the expense of other classes and other interests in the Colony. Let us remember that protection is not an unmixed good, and that it sometimes costs more than it is really worth. It should also be remembered that the importance of protection is somewhat localized in its application. Nature has given ample protection to the interior of the Colony; and it is, in reality, only on this Island and the Lower Fraser that artificial protection can be desirable. I venture to think that there is a great future before Vancouver Island, but I do not believe that it will ever owe its greatness to agricultural development. I believe that its commercial, maritime, mineral, and manufacturing industries will far outweigh its farming interests, and I do not think, therefore, that we would be justified in refusing Confederation upon fair and equitable terms, simply because we could not have power to regulate the Customs tariff. I regret that I am unable to agree with any one of the recommendations now before the Committee. The wisest course, in my opinion, will be to ask the Dominion Government to withhold the application of the Federal tariff of Customs to British Columbia for a fixed period, say, until railway