

*Newfoundland*

cial rights. Well, my assumption is that he has in mind the next election. One place in Canada where his party is very weak is the province of Quebec, where they are very strong for provincial rights. Another place they are very weak is the province of Nova Scotia, where they have no members in the legislature and very little leadership. But the premier of Nova Scotia is also very strong for provincial rights, as he indicated at the last dominion-provincial conference. So I may be excused for my assumption that the leader of the opposition has those two provinces in mind.

In addition, when we began to discuss the Newfoundland agreement the same theme was interjected into that discussion. Again it was dominion-provincial rights; and unfortunately the government, instead of trying to bring the house back to the real bread and butter issues of this country, fell into the trap and went along with the discussion of provincial rights. As a result we have had a straight academic discussion in this house that very few people outside the house can understand. I know letters I have received have been to this effect: "Why are you fellows wasting time up there? Prices are away up. Unemployment is increasing. There are many internal issues to which you should be devoting your time."

In my opinion we settled the question of Newfoundland. After a long debate we decided that the agreement was fair and reasonable, and this house voted unanimously that Newfoundland should come into confederation. All right. Then there was the question of giving effect to the decision we had made in connection with the agreement. That meant we had to change the statutes of Canada in order to back up the decision already made unanimously, or with one exception; one hon. member down here said no. That should have been a simple process, taking very little of the time of this house, if we meant what we said when we voted to bring Newfoundland into confederation. Instead of that, however, the very capable leader of the opposition set out to raise an issue for the next federal election that would not mean anything to the people of this country. "Keep away from our economic problems. Keep away from the problems that affect the average, everyday person in this country in connection with the things that go on his table. Let us make the issue at the next election the question of dominion-provincial relations, which does not mean anything to the people of this country, but which gives us a good opportunity to set up an issue with which we might be able to confuse them."

[Mr. Gillis.]

That is my conception of the thing as I have watched it develop. The leader of the opposition moves an amendment to the original motion, in which he says the provinces should be consulted. Well, what happens after they are consulted? As the hon. member for Vancouver East pointed out, one province has the veto, and you are finished. What happens to the decision we made to bring Newfoundland within confederation? That is out also. The people of Newfoundland have said they want to come in, and the Canadian people want to bring them in. We know that, if we bring Newfoundland into confederation and make available to them the social services that we have in this country, we will be relieving human misery; and as far as I am concerned the legality of any action is determined by the justice of the cause. I am willing to take any step, after consulting the members of this House of Commons, to relieve human misery because I think that is a justifiable action.

The amendment proposed by the leader of the opposition does not mean anything. It merely created the opportunity for a debate. It provided a chance to get the headlines. The leader of the opposition is fighting, but he is not firing many shots. He is careful to propose an amendment that does not mean anything after the provinces are consulted. The hon. member for Quebec-Montmorency (Mr. LaCroix), seconded by the hon. member for Temiscouata (Mr. Pouliot), moved a sub-amendment that means something. That sub-amendment says the provinces not only should be consulted but that they should give their consent. I shall be watching with great attention to see how my hon. friends vote on that point.

As far as I am concerned the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton), when he took part in this debate a few days ago, stated the question very clearly and fairly. The other four or five provinces he mentioned were brought in after a discussion in this House of Commons. No plebiscite was taken; the matter was determined here. We had the same British North America Act at that time. Newfoundland has been consulted; two plebiscites were taken, after all the issues and terms were made available to the people of Newfoundland. And they decided to come in. As I said when I spoke briefly on this matter a few days ago, I was amazed at the representative vote that was obtained. Those people had not cast a ballot since 1934. The great majority of them cast a ballot for the first time in those plebiscites. They were isolated, in outports, with no radio available and the propaganda coming practically from one side only. But when the people of New-