

Newfoundland

remain, jealous of the rights and authorities of the provinces of this great dominion. If there never has been laid down a procedure by which constitutional amendments can take place, a procedure which will preserve the rights of the provinces, then I say it is high time it was done. Perhaps this amendment provides the starting point from which such a procedure can be built.

I am not afraid to say what I would do as to the number of provinces that should consent to the bringing in of another province. If the reference mentioned in this amendment is placed before the provinces, I think it is reasonable to say to them that if two-thirds of the provinces express their desire to support this resolution, then the wishes of those two-thirds will be made the rule for Canada. I think that is the arrangement that is adhered to in the United States. But my opinion may not be the opinion of the provinces. Let them say. We are waiving even in this resolution one further safeguard to the constitution, and that is reference to the people themselves. That is a further safeguard that is used in the United States. I do not think it is at all unreasonable to consult with the provinces and to ask them for their support in laying down a procedure for future constitutional amendments. If two-thirds of them, or any other fraction agreed to by the provinces themselves, indicate their support of this resolution, on the terms that have been set out in the bill, I think the decision should be binding upon the whole of Canada. The precedent would then be established for governing future constitutional amendments.

I do not think there is anything further I should say at this time, except this one thing. When the leader of the C.C.F. says that it is time that we reviewed our constitution and laid down some procedure for bringing it more into line with the times in which we live, I should like to say that I have never been able to see why in the world anyone should be in a hurry when he is on the wrong road. Let us be sure that we are on the right road before we move, especially in regard to a matter that affects the rights and privileges of provinces that certainly have been given a good measure of autonomy under the British North America Act. I intend to support the amendment.

Hon. Brooke Claxton (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, the debate last week was remarkable for three things. One of them was the unanimity with which the members of this parliament, representing all the people of Canada, expressed their views on this subject, and the good will and the good spirit with which the debate was conducted. The second thing for which the

debate was remarkable was the fact that the complex matters contained in the terms of union were thoroughly discussed, questions were raised and answered, and in the end there was still unanimity on both the substance and the form of the terms. This, I think, reflected great credit on the soundness of the position taken by the government of Canada and also on the way in which the negotiations had been conducted. The third remarkable feature was this. I believe I speak not only for hon. members on this side of the house but also for some others—

Mr. Cockeram: The C.C.F.

Mr. Claxton:—when I say that the events of the week were remarkable for the way in which one man led the debate on this subject and achieved a performance unsurpassed in this house during my eight years in parliament. I refer to the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. St. Laurent). He showed himself to be a great parliamentarian and a great constitutional lawyer. He showed himself to have a grasp of this subject unequalled, I believe, in any part of Canada. He showed a frankness and a fairness that must have won the admiration of my hon. friends opposite, as it won ours. In the former Prime Minister, the member for Glengarry (Mr. Mackenzie King) and the present Prime Minister who succeeded him, we have two men whose names, in the minds and hearts of the people of Canada, should be added to those who will be recognized throughout the years as indeed the fathers of confederation.

It is a matter of some regret that the unanimity with which our deliberations were conducted last week seems to have been broken by the course followed today by the leader of the opposition. At the outset, may I say that I regard it, as did the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart (Mr. Coldwell), as a challenge to the very concept of confederation itself, to the place of Canada as a nation, and to the rights of this parliament to deal with matters that affect all the people of Canada.

On the concept of confederation, I will not weary hon. members with numerous quotations. But I will give just those which I believe state, more authoritatively than any that can be found anywhere else, what the fathers of confederation intended when they adopted the Quebec resolutions which led to the act of confederation itself. I refer to the confederation debates, at page 27.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Of what date?

Mr. Claxton: The year 1865. I am quoting from the confederation debates, page 27,