

*Newfoundland*

it is time they act jointly and positively. Why do they not use the procedure followed by the fathers of confederation?

We are accused of departing from the spirit and the procedure of the discussions prior to confederation. Why then do not these premiers set us on the right road? Why do they not revive that period preliminary to the confederative pact? It would be very easy to do so.

The prime ministers would only need to hold preliminary conferences among themselves such as the Quebec or Charlottetown conferences, for example, which later resulted in joint resolutions being forwarded to the imperial government which sanctions the Canadian constitution.

What is there to prevent the prime ministers from following that course if they absolutely want their autonomy to be protected? I have consulted neither the members of my party nor any member of the cabinet, but I may tell this house with a fair degree of certainty that if the prime ministers of the provinces also held preliminary conferences among themselves and, after considering the different proposals of each province, if they could reach a common agreement accepted by the nine provinces, I am sure that later on the leader of the central government would not object to receiving them and considering the situation with them, the basis of this inter-provincial conference being the decisions taken by the above-mentioned preliminary conferences.

Here is a practical action which the premiers of the provinces have not as yet deemed fit to take since the beginning of this long debate on this matter of the Canadian constitution and its amendments.

At the time of the interprovincial conferences we witnessed a political bargaining such as had never been observed in the history of Canada. We saw the provincial premiers come here after having examined—or rather after having had the opportunity to examine—the proposals submitted by the central government, and behave as if it were a matter of making the highest bid.

Is it thus, Mr. Speaker, that we can hope to solve the ticklish problem of amending our constitution?

As the Prime Minister said in a radio speech, the logical consequence of the abolition of appeals to the privy council will be that we shall have to find the means of

amending our constitution. That fact provides the provincial premiers with an opportunity to take action. It is now up to them to speak; it behooves them to do something. Let them tell us plainly and with a unanimous voice what they want. Let them tell us how they intend to protect their prerogatives, which they claim are so seriously threatened. I am sure that if the threat is as great as they represent it, the action I am suggesting to them is justified under the circumstances.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, I am not afraid to state that their silence will be construed as a stand of non-co-operation, a stand indicating that they wish to carry on the debate, hoping to benefit from it in future provincial elections.

I know that last summer all the sins of Israel were blamed on that lack of understanding between the provinces and Ottawa. There were cries of persecution and despoiling by the federal government. The provincial premiers have there a good alibi for their inertness, an eternal alibi for their failure to provide for social security in their own provinces and they will take no chance of losing it.

Instead of protesting, instead of repeating their autonomist statements, these premiers would be appreciated by all the Canadian people if they had the courage to take the initiative in making concrete suggestions and to tell the central government, with a unanimous voice, what they want.

The fathers of confederation, to which they seem to compare themselves today, did not fear to tell the imperial government with a unanimous voice what their wishes were as to the basis of the Canadian constitution. And I must add, for the benefit of the advocates of federal autonomy, that when the imperial government dealt with the resolutions from the Quebec and Charlottetown conferences, that same imperial government did not lose any of its autonomy for having given first the provinces or colonies the liberty of putting forth jointly and consistently their views on this important question. Likewise the central authority will not lose its autonomy by telling the provinces: "You claim that our method of proceeding is prejudicial to your privileges. Well, kindly submit us your representations, through preliminary conferences, to which, I feel sure, the central authority will be pleased and will make it a point to send the necessary experts and statisticians to supply the provinces with all information and data they may need. I believe I can say that the dominion government does not lose any of its autonomy in acting that way. Moreover, I add that this