

Newfoundland

consulted the provinces we would be told we could not proceed unless they were unanimous. The veto would indeed be applied. My chief reason for opposing the amendment is that it creates a precedent, and we do not know where it may lead us.

An hon. Member: It would lead to chaos.

Mr. MacInnis: As someone behind me says, it would lead to chaos, because it would mean there could never be amendment of our constitution, of the British North America Act, unless all the provinces were unanimous. Is there any member of the official opposition who wants that state of affairs? Is there anyone on the other side of the house who wants that state of affairs? As a matter of fact, if we are going to carry on in that way, then parliament will lose all its significance as a national legislative body. Then again a great deal was said, particularly by my Social Credit friends, about the dangers of centralization, and the dangers of stateism, whatever that is. I imagine stateism means having things done by the state. If that is a correct definition of stateism, I do not believe there are many people in Canada who are opposed to it, because almost every group in Canada is asking the state to do something. They are not all asking the state to do the same thing, but every one of them is asking the state to do something for them.

Let us see how much is in all these warnings about the dangers of centralization. If we followed the argument of my Social Credit friends to its logical conclusion we would not have a confederation at all, because confederation in itself is centralization. We have been told again and again in this house that the fathers of confederation, and particularly the greatest of the fathers, Sir John A. Macdonald, wanted a strong central government. Do we want a strong central government, or do we want a government which, whenever it wants to do anything of a national character, must consult every province? Do we want a government that cannot act until every province says, "yes, go ahead"? Surely that makes nonsense of our pretensions of nationhood. It makes nonsense of almost everything that has been said by the official opposition and the Social Credit party during the past two days. There is always a danger that power will be abused, but the way to assure that it will not is not to create a situation where no one will have any power to do anything. The way to provide against that is to have an educated public opinion which will understand what is required and know when governments are going too far. Then the sovereign people on the one day that they are sovereign, election day, will take such action as will bring about the results they desire.

I have been interested in the political affairs of Canada for some considerable time. I have watched legislation in the provinces, and I have watched legislation in the dominion parliament. I am bound to say that, as far as I can see, on the basis of the legislation that has been enacted by our provinces and the legislation that has been enacted by this parliament, the freedom of the Canadian people is just as safe in the hands of the parliament of Canada as it is in the hands of any of the provincial legislatures. Why be afraid then that a government has the power to do the things that the sovereign people of Canada want it to do?

I do not know that there is any reason why I should say any more. I think I have made it clear that in the first place the resolution before us follows a precedent that has long been established by this parliament; and that, in the second place, the amendment if it were adopted, would create a new precedent and one which, in my opinion, is dangerous because we do not know where it would lead. Where it would lead would perhaps depend upon the whim of the government of one province. Let us have faith in this Canada of ours, and faith that the men and women we elect to the parliament of Canada will do the things that are in the best interests of all the people of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Clarence Gillis (Cape Breton South): There is plenty of time. We have been trying to solve this problem since 1867. We should not try to finish it tonight. I am going to take about ten minutes because in the past couple of weeks, on this question of international law, the British North America Act and the rights of the provinces I as a layman have had a first-class demonstration that very few people in this house know very much about it, and that the whole matter can be twisted to suit the viewpoint of a particular person for political reasons.

The hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. MacInnis) said he wanted to make his position clear, and I am rising at this time to make my position clear. When the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart (Mr. Coldwell) spoke he indicated that as far as we were concerned this group would support the original motion, and I stand by that. But during the debate on the speech from the throne I said I was disappointed that the government had permitted the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) to set the tone of that debate, completely ignoring anything that was in the speech from the throne and saying very little about what was not in it. He decided that the issue in this house as far as he was concerned was going to be dominion-provin-