

Keep hands off—Provinces must be free in matter of education.

In a sermon preached in this city by a distinguished gentleman, the Rev. Dr. Spencer, in Emmanuel Reformed Episcopal Church:

He argued that the scriptures do not warrant a state church in any form. The union of church and state, he said, would be fraught with trouble. National money should be used for national purposes only and not for the promotion of any propaganda or teaching of dogmas of any sect.

He concludes by saying:

We should say to any church: Keep your hands off the public treasury—and we would say to the state: Keep your hands off the church. Give to no denomination privileges not common to all and to no one of them precedence by right.

That is a protest from the Church of England body in this country, and I would remind the right hon. gentleman that it represents in the main the feeling of the Church of England people in every province in Canada. I am therefore right in saying that the Church of England denomination of this country are opposed to the Autonomy Bill in so far as it takes away the rights of the people in the western provinces to deal with their own educational matters. What is the opinion of the Baptist Church?

Baptists state their position. Let new provinces determine their policy. Bill was a surprise. A large and representative meeting of Baptists was held last evening in the lecture room of the Bloor Street Baptist Church, Toronto, to consider the situation arising out of the introduction in parliament of the Autonomy Bills creating the new provinces. A resolution was unanimously carried by a standing vote protesting against the proposed legislation.

I think I shall read that resolution, because I am anxious that the Baptists shall be put on record. I heard the Minister of Customs say the other night that some of the criticism was from gentlemen who did not understand the question and were unable to give a fair and honest opinion, but I invite the attention of the Minister of Customs to this resolution, and I will ask him whether it does not speak as if those behind it understood the question quite as well as some gentlemen on the other side of the House and possibly as some members of the government. The resolution reads as follows:

Whereas, the British North America Act, as to provinces other than Ontario and Quebec, provides that each province may exclusively make laws in relation to education, subject to the right of the Dominion parliament when appealed to in a specific case to enact remedial legislation; and the Imperial Amending Act of 1871 empowers the Dominion parliament to establish new provinces, and to define the constitution thereof, but prohibits such parliament from ever afterwards altering such constitution;

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And whereas, the Bill establishing the new provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan proposes to make the maintenance of a separate school system a permanent constitutional obligation of these new provinces, thus depriving them of their full provincial rights and fettering their whole future educational development;

And whereas, the introduction at any time of such a question into federal politics is calculated to awaken ill-feeling on a subject in regard to which the Canadian people are peculiarly sensitive; and more especially at this time, since no intimation was given to the electorate prior or during the recent general elections that it was intended in connection with the granting of autonomy to the Territories to impose any such fetters.

Therefore this meeting of Baptist citizens respectfully protest against the proposed legislation, and expresses the hope that the government may so modify its Bills as to leave the determination of their future educational policy to the free action of the new provinces.

I may say to the right hon. Prime Minister that Mayor Urquhart, of Toronto, the gentleman to whom he sent a very interesting telegram last election was present at this meeting and he stood up with the others and endorsed this resolution in favour of leaving educational matters to the provinces. Mr. D. E. Thomson, K.C., a distinguished gentleman in the city of Toronto, spoke thus in support of this resolution:

Under the powerful leadership of Hon. George Brown the Liberal party had made a stand for the principle of local government and provincial rights. The Liberal party were returned to power in 1896 on that stand. . . . To pass the Autonomy Bills now before parliament would be a complete reversal of the policy, both of the Liberal leader and party. If Sir Wilfrid Laurier be sincere in his suggestion that the provisions of the British North America Act cover the ground, why not leave the question to the Act? . . . If Sir Wilfrid Laurier had told his policy in advance he would have come out of the election twenty short.

Mr. Thomson points out that if this matter had been submitted to the people in the last election, instead of my right hon. friend sitting on that side of the House he would be sitting on this side in opposition. That speaks for the Baptist people of Canada, and I leave it for the consideration of the Prime Minister.

There is another denomination, called the Congregationalists, not very large, yet very important. The Rev. Dr. Wild, a gentleman well versed in those questions, spoke at a meeting in Toronto a few days ago and said:

Of the thirty-two nationalities that will compose these two new provinces, most of them of different churches and creeds, we cannot expect to favour any one race or creed at the expense of the others. The state has its rights and must look especially to the education of its citizens. If we are to have an intelligent population as voters this is essential. No church, creed or race must have special legislation that will discriminate against others. A