

*Newfoundland*

have not even taken the trouble of officially making known their attitude on the procedure we are presently following in this house.

As a matter of fact, I personally checked up and was informed from official sources that not one of the nine premiers of the Canadian provinces has officially protested to the leader of the government against the procedure which we are following to amend the constitution, that is, regarding the amendment to the constitution we are now discussing.

While the nine premiers were clamouring against federal government persecution, not one of them felt the need of suggesting in an official letter to the leader of the government, the procedure he wished the house to follow in connection with the annexation of Newfoundland. Do these same premiers feel that the provincial autonomy of Quebec, and that of the other nine provinces, is safeguarded by the mere fact that they made contradictory statements, or that they are entrenched for the preservation of provincial rights behind their own recriminating oratory?

Such, Mr. Speaker, is the negative stand taken by the provinces of this country since 1938. No province ever took steps, or submitted to the federal government practical means of amending the constitution, either as a whole or in connection with the taxation structure. Mr. Speaker, we need only go back to the days of the Rowell-Sirois commission. The provinces were consulted by the commission on proposals made thereafter by the federal government.

This commission sat throughout the country, from Vancouver to Halifax. And now these premiers, claiming to have been wronged because they have not been consulted, have taken a stand I shall now explain. To define the stand taken by these premiers at the time I shall refer to Wilfrid Eggleston's excellent book entitled: *Road to Nationhood*. On pages 115 and 116 of this book Mr. Eggleston writes as follows, and I quote in English:

*(Text):*

In a letter to the secretary dated July 13, 1938, the Ontario premier concluded: "Under the circumstances, my colleagues and I have decided to disassociate ourselves entirely from any participation in so far as these deliberations are concerned."

Mr. Eggleston continues:

This meant, among other things, that the compilation of the public finance figures of Ontario was brought to a halt.

Premier Hepburn's decision was lauded by premier Aberhart of Alberta, who called the inquiry a "national menace" and a "piece of political futility." These reports were coupled with press statements of "alliances" between Hepburn and Duplessis. The *Montreal Gazette* contended that there was no longer a commission. The *Globe and Mail* of Toronto proposed that Right Hon. R. B. Bennett be invited to fill the chairman's place. Other editors wondered what could be salvaged from "the wreck." These circumstances are recalled here to show the atmo-

[Mr. Langlois.]

sphere in which for a part of the time at least the commission was compelled to pursue its inquiry.

*(Translation):*

And then, at page 107, the author writes:

*(Text):*

The first serious hitch in the collection of public finance statistics from the nine provinces had occurred early in March, 1938, when Premier Maurice Duplessis of Quebec absolutely declined to go on with the preparation of answers to the questionnaire which had been circulated by the commission for its comparative study of provincial finances. He cloaked his non-co-operative gesture behind the assertion that he could not rely upon the figures of earlier administrations.

*(Translation):*

This shows the lack of co-operation, not to say the obstruction, on the part of the provincial premiers regarding that commission. And now, the leader of the opposition contending to speak on behalf of those same premiers, asserts that the provinces should be consulted on the proposed amendment to the Canadian constitution.

Yesterday, a speaker interpreted this amendment as meaning that the leader of the opposition was thereby seeking the provinces' consent. The latter might then have to face a dilemma resulting from the following probability: What would happen should one province voice opposition, while the other eight provinces approved? Immediately after, other members of his party stated that such was not the purpose of the amendment, but that it rather aimed at stressing the need of safeguarding the right of the provinces to be consulted in circumstances of that kind. Through this amendment, which has no other meaning, we are saying to the provinces: "Very well, we shall be nice enough to seek your advice, but whatever be your answer, we shall take no heed of it."

To take refuge in such a procedure for the sole protection of our most precious rights and privileges is a strange way of protecting the autonomy of the provinces.

I said a while ago, Mr. Speaker, that so far the provinces had taken but a negative stand in the matter of autonomy, and I believe that my own remarks and those I have quoted have made clear that very important point in these discussions.

The same thing is happening here today. So far we have had but one semi-political statement from a premier who, from his vantage point of premier of the province of Quebec, claims that the province should be consulted in this case, but does not go to the trouble of sending to Ottawa his official protest or suggestions.

If the premiers of the provinces concerned are so jealous of their autonomy, if they are sincere when they claim the autonomy of the provinces is endangered by the central power,