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THE GREAT QUESTION

A Continuation of the Assembly Debate on Autonomy.

ONE OR TWO PROVINCES?

Speeches Delivered by Dr. Elliott and Messrs. McKay, Gillis, Villeneuve and Smith—Expressions of Regret and Rejoicing over the Dominion Government's Action—The Question of a Mandate.

The report of the debate on provincial autonomy in the Legislative Assembly on April 8th, which arose on Mr. Maitland's motion of regret that the Dominion Government had decided not to introduce legislation at the present session of Parliament with a view to granting provincial institutions to the Territories, is continued below:

Dr. Elliott (Wolseley) followed Dr. Patrick. In rising to support the resolution he said he could not but express his surprise at some of the statements made by the hon. member for Yorkton. That hon. gentleman knew full well that this question of provincial autonomy had been discussed not only in the House but throughout the country, and in almost every constituency was brought before the electors. Even in the hon. gentleman's own constituency of Yorkton it was brought prominently before the electors, and every member of the House knew that the Government did have a mandate from the people to deal with the question. It is the hon. gentleman who has only taken this trouble to feel the pulse of the people they would have found that there is a strong and general desire that the Government should deal with it at once. If there was one point raised it was because the Government had not proceeded rapidly enough in their negotiations with the federal government and had not succeeded in getting provincial institutions before this time. The hon. member for Yorkton had told that if they had one province they would have an antagonised Manitoba, and if two provinces, a satisfied Manitoba ready to fall in and help both provinces. But then the hon. gentleman proposed to add the whole area of Athabasca and then divide into two parts and form provinces three times as large as Manitoba. (Hear, hear.) He did not think that the people of Manitoba who would be so excited over the formation of a province four times their size would be willing to have two provinces three times as large as Manitoba. The Assembly was not there to act to suit the people of Manitoba, but to work for themselves, and work out their own salvation. Their duty was to propose to the Dominion Parliament what was necessary and then let it take the responsibility of saying what it would do. If the Dominion Government had made a proposition to the local Government that they would give them two provinces upon the terms asked for one, then the Government would have been called upon to consider it, but it would have been foolish to go and say: "Give us one province, but not satisfied to do that, give us two or more."

NEGOTIATIONS WERE NOT SECRET.

He (Elliott) did not think the Government of Canada did their duty in sending such a reply after what the House and country had been led to expect by members of that Government. He considered it unwise for the members for Yorkton to break off the negotiations having been done in secret.

Dr. Patrick—I never made any such statement.

Dr. Elliott—I refer the hon. gentleman to reports of his speeches in this House in 1899. He can find them in the records if he will look them up and if I have made a false statement I will be pleased to apologise for having done so. Do the hon. gentlemen opposite believe in provincial autonomy and do they want it at the present time or at some indefinite time in the future? They are not riding one valuable horse to death, neither two, but a whole band of brutes travelling in different directions at the same time. (Laughter.) They are divided in two instead of being united. Has the hon. gentleman from Yorkton forgotten his scheme of three provinces with attempting to make secret deals and as being inimical, as the member for Yorkton had done in regard to this matter? Every member of the House knew there was nothing secret about it but that all was open and above board, and that the demands made on behalf of the people of this country were known to the people. The hon. member for Yorkton had spoken of the exorbitant demands made by the premier in his bill to Ottawa.

Dr. Patrick—I did not say that.

Dr. Elliott—it was not in the word letter. It was "united" I think.

Continuing Dr. Elliott said this matter was a new departure, a new question, and that it must be dealt with in a clear and definite manner. The premier of Canada asked the premier of the Territories to put his terms in a clear and definite statement and also must be agreed that they could not have been put more clearly or definitely than they were in that draft bill.

Every member knew that it was a clear and plain statement and he supposed that it would be charged against the prime minister that there was nothing new in it. There was nothing new in the demands made in that bill. The hon. gentleman from Yorkton had bill the speech of the premier by the premier in Yorkton in 1899.

Dr. Patrick—It was not a conclusion.

Dr. Elliott—if the hon. gentleman for Yorkton were only ten years behind the times he would be much better informed than he is today. (Laughter.)

If the hon. gentleman referred to the speech made in 1899, and if the man who sold out his business in Yorkton and moved to Saltcoats for the purpose of contesting that constituency based his conclusions on that speech, then he (the speaker) must feel that this man had no better idea of that speech than the hon. gentleman had who drew erroneous conclusions from it.

Dr. Patrick—it was not a conclusion; it was a direct statement by the speaker.

PEOPLE PREPARED FOR AUTONOMY.

Dr. Elliott continuing said the people were preparing provincial institutions at once. They must have power to build railways, etc. They had given a mandate to the Government. In the last general election they had expressed confidence in the Government, and in the members of the House, and it was not the duty of members to appeal to the people on every flimsy excuse that might come up. They knew the people were prepared for provincial autonomy on the lines laid down by the Government. The hon. gentleman from Yorkton said the school lands should be held in trust. They certainly would be. He also agreed with everything proposed in the speech of the hon. member for Yorkton except that the provinces should be divided into two provinces instead of one. The hon. gentleman changed his mind so frequently that he should not be taken very seriously when he proposed two provinces. He might be back the next week to three provinces, or follow the suggestion (the speaker) had made and ask for

the size of Prince Edward Island? If the small provinces could administer their affairs successfully, why not a large province divided into two instead of two? But when the hon. gentleman attempted to prove that small provinces were administered more economically than large ones he took a few figures and drew deductions from them which could not be drawn if he followed a careful science of reasoning. One would think he was the representative of eastern Canada or Manitoba when he said that he would not permit of one province being formed.

ALL WORKING FOR CANADA'S BENEFIT

The Dominion Government had tried to comply with the demand of the local Government but had simply postponed the matter for the present, giving the flimsy excuse of a divergence of opinion as a reason for their action. If they waited for unanimity they would never get it until the Dominion Government had a mandate.

It was said that the Dominion

could not agree with because he believed the Government exceeded its authority and asked too much in their negotiations with the federal authorities. It was quite true the Government were authorised by the House to negotiate with the Dominion Government. It derived its authority from the resolution passed on May 2, 1900. The latter part of that resolution said: "We do most humbly pray that Your Excellency will be graciously pleased to grant to the Territories such a right as may be required to be made and grants taken with a view to the settlement of the terms and conditions upon which the Territories or any part thereof shall be established as a province, and that, before any such province is established, opportunity should be given to the people of the Territories, through their accredited representatives, of considering and discussing such terms and conditions." It appeared to him that the Government went about the matter in a wrong way by assuming too much and exceeded the authority given it under that resolution. After going to Ottawa and suggesting the conditions and terms to which the Territories should be admitted to the Dominion, he had to come back to the legislature and submit those conditions and terms to the legislature and people and ask for their approval. He believed in conducting business by the people for the lands taken away and compensation for the exemption from taxation of a very large portion of the country, and what allowance they were given to receive to meet their responsibilities they have to assume. These were the most vital questions to the country which overshadowed to a very large extent the question of one province or two provinces.

If a member of the House had made up his mind as to the number of provinces, and was in favor of two, he should give the approximate boundaries of those provinces. Would the gentlemen opposite say the question of northern and southern provinces, or eastern and western should be left for future consideration and then when the question came up to be decided as to how the Territories were to be divided would be left to the Dominion? He did not know if you will have to take the responsibility?" If it was time to know that the Territories should be divided into two provinces it was time they knew how it should be done. (Hear, hear.) This should have been discussed in the speech made by the hon. member for Yorkton. He compared the demands made by the Territorial Government on the Dominion Government to the boy trying to get a whole jugsful of nuts at once. He thought they should take one by one. The hon. gentleman was probably thinking of the time when he thought they should get full provincial powers about 26 years from the present time.

GOVERNMENT DEMANDS REASONABLE.

Dr. Elliott said he did not wish to go further with the question. The hon. member had taken up so many things and gone over them in his characteristic erratic manner that it was very difficult to follow him. (Hear, hear and laughter.) If the conditions had been founded on facts and arrived at by proper methods of reasoning it would not have been a difficult task, but when he proposed to focus a province containing 220,000 square miles and said the provinces should be approximately equal in area he was making a very grave statement, when Prince Edward Island was only an insignificant area compared with the one he proposed. Manitoba was only a third the size of the province he proposed. It was no wonder therefore, that a man could not follow the reasoning of the hon. gentleman. That gentleman also claimed that the demands were very reasonable. It was a year ago that he was in the lifetime of a nation. The people might have suffered the disadvantages under which they were placed but he was prepared to do so rather than have legislative deal with the subject when another election would be held in a short time.

A DYING LEGISLATURE.

He could not understand by what process of reasoning the speaker came to the conclusion that he had a mandate, more especially for a dying legislature, to deal with such an important question. Such an action would be very unwise. A year's delay was all that was asked for and what was a year in the lifetime of a nation.

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The premier in speaking to the resolution in 1900 had said that the question was not one to be settled within less than a year or two. He was bringing it down to be discussed. He had also said that that the Government had no mandate to plunge the people into a province. Therefore it was very improper that the Assembly should deal with it, having no mandate to do so, more especially on the eve of a general election. It was quite right and proper to discuss it in the House and lead up to it gradually but they had no cause to complain that the federal authorities did not grant what was asked for last session.

THE QUESTION OF LANDS.

As to the terms the Government proposed they ought to be no difference of opinion but unfortunately there had been a difference of opinion and it had come from a quarter from which it should not have come. In the budget last year it was claimed that the land question was settled and that we had no lands. This was not true but it was the opinion of the majority of the members of the House that the Government had no lands worth asking for. Such differences of opinion have got to be threshed out in the House to vote unanimously on that resolution the premier went to Ottawa and drafted a bill and asked the federal authorities that this large area should be erected into one province. We take exception to that, because we did not expect it would be done and we are, therefore, not prepared to vote for this resolution. We accordingly submit an alternative and are prepared to fight the next election out on that ground and the hon. gentleman can bring it on just as soon as they like. (Hear, hear.)

MANITOBA'S UNFAIR ATTEMPT.

I think questions of this kind should be approached very slowly. It is very important and however great we may feel the necessity of dealing with the question we should first give the people an opportunity of discussing it. This is a large country and the people are scattered over a very wide area. I believe that the members of this House at one time were prepared to see a portion annexed to Manitoba, but if so they have changed their minds. The asking for such a large area would be a good excuse for the Dominion Government to give Manitoba a part. By asking for two provinces it would do away with any grounds for giving it to her. We must admit the attitude of Manitoba in desiring a portion of the Territories. They know it is a good country and that the people would give just as good an account of themselves as the Manitobans. We do not wish to antagonise Manitoba but to give her a portion of the territory and the opposition will be helped to that extent by having out the northern part. It was unfair of that province to try and stoned our property when we were not in a position to say yes or no. If we were a province the federal authorities would have no power to take away our territory, but unfortunately as we are we have nothing to say in the matter, only protest.

In dealing with this question as we have done, the people will be satisfied with the attitude we have taken as we propose to give them an alternative proposition. We have only one before them. The Opposition have now adopted a platform of provincial autonomy and the people have an opportunity of having an alternative. If they are satisfied with the proposition given by the Government I will be quite satisfied to abide by it, but if they adopt ours I will be still better satisfied. (Cheers.)

MR. A. B. GILLIS

followed Mr. McKay. He said this was certainly the most important question the House ever had to deal with and probably the most important it would ever be called upon to deal with and it was, therefore, the duty of

the House to vote for the resolution.

(Continued on page 5)

so it was a very poor way of showing it.

FEDERAL GRANT FOR GOVERNMENT.

The hon. member for Wolseley thought that if it was good to have two provinces, it was better to have half a dozen. Well, if they could convince him, and he thought they could, to have two instead of one he was quite at liberty to have them cut up into a dozen. They were not asking too much in asking for two provinces. True it would mean a larger expenditure from federal sources for government but it must be remembered that they were asking for this not for nothing. They would have to give up something for it. The provinces had to give up the right to levy customs taxes which amounted to something like \$400,000,000, an average of \$100 per head of the population. Thus the Territories had given up the right of collecting \$1,200,000 and their population was only 100,000.

When anyone advocated cutting up the Territories into a dozen provinces they were asking for an absurdity.

They might as well ask for townships to be formed into provinces. It had been asked where the Opposition stood on this question. The amendment outlined their provincial autonomy platform at the present time. It declined for two provinces was clear cut with nothing reasonable about it.

A voice from the Government benches—Which two?

Mr. McKay—I will answer you in the words of your leader. He says the Government wishes there should be unanimity on this question and they wish to avoid all controversial sides to this question. (Hear, hear, cheers and laughter.)

CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS.

He admitted frankly that when the division of the Territories came it was quite possible there would be a divergence of opinion on the Opposition side, but at present they would do as the premier had asked and avoid all controversial subjects. If that was a good answer for the Government to give, it was certainly good when given by the Opposition. But, continued Mr. McKay, when we occupy the treasury benches if there are controversial questions we will be prepared to fight it out. (Hear, hear.)

We voted for the resolution in 1900 unanimously for we did not wish to weaken the attitude taken by the Government, and, therefore, we were prepared to vote that they should go as far as the resolution indicated and in accordance with the explanation of the Attorney General that the resolution did not commit any person to one, two or three provinces. There are controversial aspects to this question but in its most important aspect it is not. We take the same attitude: it is a reasonable attitude and the only one that can be taken. The controversial questions have got to be threshed out in the House to vote unanimously on that resolution the premier went to Ottawa and drafted a bill and asked the federal authorities that this large area should be erected into one province. We take exception to that, because we did not expect it would be done and we are, therefore, not prepared to vote for this resolution. We accordingly submit an alternative and are prepared to fight the next election out on that ground and the hon. gentleman can bring it on just as soon as they like. (Hear, hear.)

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