

THE LEADER.

VOL 10.—NO. 11.

REGINA, N.W.T., THURSDAY MORNING, MAY 1, 1902.

PRICE FIVE CENTS.

BENNETT AND SIFTON

Continue the Debate On Provincial Autonomy and Ask That

BROAD VIEWS MAY PREVAIL

The Former Reviews the History of the Negotiations and Declares the Government Had No Mandate. The Latter Deals With the Inconsistent and Absurd Positions Taken by Opposition Members.

reports of the speeches Mr. R. B. Bennett (West) Mr. A. L. Sifton, Comptroller of Public Works, in the provincial autonomy:

Mr. Bennett said: Mr. quite unnecessary for me to approve of provincial ad that I desire it as much in this world. You will some three years ago I

House the time had arrived to take some better conditions in the Territories have never changed the world, and it is a source

of information to me to find an opinion in the House to-day

a necessity to take along the lines of provincial

I am, however, this face to face with a difficult

an asked to vote a resolution, the meaning of

approves. It is clothed in language than I could have put

up in concrete form the

I have expressed, and gives

outlines I then held and

and then follows these words: "Be it resolved

He regrets that the Government has decided not to

legislation at the present

Parliament with a view to

provincial institutions to the

TWO MEANINGS.

mean one of two things, the sophistry of the Attorney or his cunningly de-

It means that we

in Parliament of Canada

legislation founded on the

resented by this Government

they did not give us

the w^l on this question,

gentlemen on the treasury

and I challenge hon. mem-

ber to hold the same opinion as some

WAS DISCUSSED IN ALBERTA.

I do not hold the same opinion as some

gentlemen on this side. I will be perfectly frank. I do not propose to indulge in recriminations or to descend to the level of personalities, but on this question at least I do not wish to be misinterpreted in endeavoring to arrive at an honest conclusion. As to whether or not provincial autonomy was an issue in the elections of 1898 there may be a difference of opinion. I know nothing of what took place in Saskatchewan, or Eastern or Western Assinibina, but I do know of the constituencies surrounding Calgary and up and down the line in Alberta. It was discussed—John W. H. Sifton, gentleman from Wolsley knows nothing about it, though it was discussed indefinitely by the Attorney General in the city of Calgary. The members of the Government were dealing rather with the record of the Government, and giving an account of their stewardship, but in a speech then made the premier pointed out that the time had almost arrived when some great constitutional changes would have to come and it would be necessary to deal with them as men, and in the Speech from the Throne at the opening of the session that followed the general elections it was said we were then 25 years of age and had attained to that large dignity and sense of responsibility that brought with it the necessity of grappling with the question of a provincial constitution and provincial Government. I will say frankly that in the speeches I made in my constituency I did as strongly as possible advocate provincial autonomy as a relief from the ills from which we were suffering.

Now following that up, in the discussion of 1898 no reference was made in the Speech from the Throne to this question. The question of our future status was not dealt with. A slight reference was made in the budget speech for some relief wherever it could be given to the people would give us credit or mete out disapproval. I do not propose to go over that question and review it at length, but in order that no misrepresentation may exist I desire to draw attention to these facts and say them again. I have nothing to retract, nothing to apologize for. My only regret, my keenest regret, is that I cannot support the demands of the Government in the resolution they have placed upon the order paper, because I regard it as of utmost importance and greatest moment to the people of the Territories that we should have autonomy in all these matters, and in particular in controlling and dealing with the future of this great land given us by Providence, and in order to make this clear I desire to look over the history of this subject.

THE EARLY STAGES REVIEWED.

When the legislature met in 1900 the

Speech from the Throne the following language was used:

"It is gratifying for me to be able to inform you that the Federal Government has proposed to Parliament now in session a moderate increase to your annual grant and a large special vote for the payment of claims arising from works destroyed by the floods. In spite of this very substantial increase to the revenue, my Government can only afford to meet a temporary and partial amelioration of otherwise impossible financial conditions, and will ask you to take action leading to the earliest practicable solution of Territorial financial and administrative problems."

In these words His Honor met the legislature. On May 2, 1900, a resolution was passed by the Assembly which called not for the establishment of provincial institutions in these Territories, but for certain well defined and positive things to which I will call the attention of the House. Had the first minister asked for power to commit these Territories to the provincial status, then I say that the action he has taken would have been amply justified, but he did not do so.

In the concluding portion of that resolution, as printed and published in the speech delivered by the premier on that occasion, these words will be found:

"His Excellency also be directed, in order to be in a position to enter into a convention with the people of the Territories upon the terms and conditions upon which the Territories or any part thereof shall be established as a province,—

and now you will observe that there are a few words in conclusion that call for most careful scrutiny,

and that before any such province is established opportunity should be given to the people of the Territories through their accredited representatives to consider and discussing such terms and conditions."

This resolution the premier moved in a speech of great ability in which he reviewed at great length the history of

we have already made.

I say further that the people of this country accepted that opinion. I stated, and other members stated, that they so understood that resolution as authorizing, directing, instructing the Government to take such steps to deal with this large question. That, I think, was the spirit in which the Government itself entered upon the negotiations, for I find that when they met the House in 1901 they had been unable to arrange a meeting with the Privy Council owing to the electors. This excuse was not an unreasonable one in view of the circumstances then prevalent.

They are other references but I take

you see at the close of his speech he said there was nothing controversial in it and that unanimous consent should be given.

As to the second point that the people were to be consulted you will find that

"After all, we are not assuming on the part of the people of the Territories that if this resolution is accepted, the right to make an agreement. We are asking simply that negotiations should be opened. In fact the most important side of this question at the present time, the most important result that will follow from this resolution being introduced at this stage, and from the discussion which may follow it, will be the further discussion which will take place throughout the country. The people of the Territories need to have explained to them what are the actual conditions under which we are working and what would be the position under the only further extension we can look forward to."

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What follows? They did undertake to speak for this country. Now, I hold a different opinion to what some have said. Some have said they no mandate, I think this Government had a mandate from this House to open these negotiations. We gave them the authority. They are the servants of this House. We are the principals. But we gave them no authority to act for one province. It was not necessary to do so to deal with these non-controversial matters. They did exceed their authority and have permitted the Dominion Government to take advantage of them.

WHAT WE EXPECTED.

The little conference took place, they put their views in writing and sent them to Ottawa enclosing a draft bill. Then certain telegrams followed urging an answer. I do not impinge bad faith but I heard two months ago that these negotiations had failed. Yet the premier apparently has been travelling over the country with the Minister of the Interior in his private car.

Mr. Haultain—Pardon me, I never travelled either in a private car or with the Minister of the Interior on a train.

Mr. Bennett—I withdraw the statement.

But the hon. gentleman meeting the Minister of the Interior as he did and discussing these matters with him must have known something of the minister's mind in dealing with these questions. Do you mean that you can discuss several matters and not get an intimation of what their mind was? On March 27, 1902 we find the Minister of the Interior sending to the first minister of this country: "I presume, however, that you would have gathered our views from the expressions of opinion which took place during our interviews, and our conclusions will be the same." Now, sir, that answer was inadequate and I think the reply sent by the first minister is a rather conclusive reply, and he met every argument fairly, but unfortunately he had no authority to put in the controversial matter. The agent exceeded his authority. The other men new it and said we do not know you, consequently there was no bargain.

It is a significant fact that while the Attorney General is exercising

bers, to deny that we are asked to regret that the Dominion Government did not pass the draft bill laid before it, or that we regret that the Parliament of Canada did not, without consulting us, asking our opinion, or giving us a right to be heard pass any legislation they saw fit. I cannot agree to either of these propositions. I say it with regret. I would have liked to have that unanimity continue to prevail until this question had passed out of existence so far as this country is concerned. I should have wished that, but yet, sir, I think it is no fault of myself, or any man, to believe on the side of the House, that that condition of affairs did not prevail, and in order that I might make perfectly clear the opinion I have and the fact that is within me, I propose to take some little time to discuss, go over and review the history of these negotiations in order that it may never be afforded to any hon. gentleman to go on the hustings or by deliberately false statements or misrepresentations to say that on any act or word of mine any construction could be placed other than that whatever could be done should be done to solve this problem with which is wrapped up the future of this land.

The Attorney General referred to the transportation question and my mind was carried back to some years ago and I found that once, in language almost identical with the language of the hon. member for Moose Jaw, said that the question of transportation should be dealt with by this legislature. I said the questions of grain marketing and elevators were questions of vital importance, and while we might discuss local questions that over and above and beyond all these questions there was that great question of transportation, which was not dealt with. A slight reference was made in the budget speech for some relief wherever it could be given to the people would give us credit or mete out disapproval. I do not propose to go over that question and review it at length, but in order that no misrepresentation may exist I desire to draw attention to these facts and say them again. I have nothing to retract, nothing to apologise for. My only regret, my keenest regret, is that I cannot support the demands of the Government in the resolution they have placed upon the order paper, because I regard it as of utmost importance and greatest moment to the people of the Territories that we should have autonomy in all these matters, and in particular in controlling and dealing with the future of this great

land given us by Providence, and in doing so far as the tenure of lands was concerned. That speech divides itself into two heads. Any gentleman who has read it over carefully will remember that there are two distinct heads; first, that he did not commit himself to a province or provinces and desired to eliminate from the discussion all controversial matters. I think that is a perfectly fair statement of what was done. It was not contentious and did not deal with the question of a province or provinces, and that the people were to be consulted before final action was taken. If I understand the English language correctly, it follows that the two heads of that speech first, avoiding all contentious matters, never minding the question of a province or provinces, and secondly, there must be a reference to the people or their accredited representatives before any final action is taken by his Government. I think that is a fair summary of that speech. Turn to page 9 of that speech and you will find that I was fearful that the Attorney General might bring in words which would be construed as an expression of opinion as to the number of provinces and that I asked the question:

Mr. Bennett: Would you not consider it incidentally dealt with in that resolution?

Mr. Haultain: No, not the use of the single word "province" shall be established as a province.

Mr. Bennett: Before any such province is established.

Mr. Haultain: Any part of the Territories can be established as a province. I am perfectly willing to make the present resolution perfectly clear on that point. There is no intention to convey the impression in a single word that the Territories have ever been expressed with regard to the title of the question.

Mr. Bennett: That is the way it is taken.

Mr. Haultain: But this is not the way it is intended, and if it is so taken it is a mistake. However, if it is so taken it is a mistake to do away with the name of province by stating that there was no such intention.

I therefore took it that the Attorney General was anxious that there should be no misapprehension on the part of the country and members as to the impression he intended to convey that he did not intend this resolution in any way to express his private or public opinion as to how the Territories should be divided. You will find that on page 16 he also makes the same statement practically. He says: "I need hardly dwell again on the necessity for unanimity. If we are not unanimous we are not going to accomplish much. Our individual opinion will not be of much use unless backed up by a strong public opinion. The duty of every member of this House is to develop that public opinion by discussion and to bring these matters before the people of the country in order to show that there are large interests at stake, and that they have many claims and rights which it may be they have hitherto not realised, and which can only be established by the fullest enquiry and negotiation. Exaggerated claims may be made, and possibly have been made, but the matters which I have referred to are not matters of fancy or speculation. We have an enormous country with tremendous interests and an almost boundless future. We should not be staggered by the realisation of the splendid heritage we are entitled to but should rather be uplifted and urged on to try to establish these rights and have these claims satisfactorily adjusted."

So you see at the close of his speech he said there was nothing controversial in it and that unanimous consent should be given.

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Now, sir, that answer was inadequate and I think the reply sent by the first minister is a rather conclusive reply, and he met every argument fairly, but unfortunately he had no authority to put in the controversial matter. The agent exceeded his authority. The other men new it and said we do not know you, consequently there was no bargain.

It is a significant fact that while the Attorney General is exercising

open negotiations without producing his authority, and I take it that the Minister of the Interior, being an astute man, and Sir Wilfrid Laurier and other astute members of the Government knew just what the instructions of these men were. They were also negotiating and had their instructions, powers, privileges, jurisdiction, and they knew to a nice just what authority the hon. gentleman had to bind these Territories. Why did they know it? Because they had the memorial of May, 1900, and the speech of the hon. gentleman in introducing it. I understand the English language well enough to follow that the two heads of that speech first, avoiding all contentious matters, never minding the question of a province or provinces, and secondly, there must be a reference to the people or their accredited representatives before any final action is taken by his Government. I think that is a fair summary of that speech. Turn to page 9 of that speech and you will find that I was fearful that the Attorney General might bring in words which would be construed as an expression of opinion as to the number of provinces and that I asked the question:

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