

*Redistribution*

As an English-speaking member of this house who has a boy who was taught French by an English teacher, I regret most sincerely that I am unable to express myself in the language of such a large proportion of the members of this House of Commons. I should like to see my own children able to express themselves in that language, and in the last few days I have had the privilege of hearing English members of the British parliament at Westminster rise before a French-speaking audience in Quebec and express themselves beautifully, with ease, and at great length in the language of our French-speaking compatriots. It seems to me that we ought to face these problems, but one problem that we must face soon is that of amending this act ourselves.

For years social legislation could not be passed because we had not the power within the British North America Act to do certain things; and even to-day the provinces, and sometimes this parliament, take shelter behind the terms of the British North America Act, declaring that we cannot do this, that or the other thing which is vitally necessary. Our social legislation is in a disgraceful condition because we have not been able to formulate plans for national social services such as New Zealand and the similar federation of Australia have been able to do within their own countries. With the developing situation in this country, with the outlook for the post-war period, we ought now to be finding ways and means of making it possible to go forward with social and economic proposals. The amendment to the constitution in the present manner is something which no self-respecting member of this house ought to accept without making some sort of effective protest.

Perhaps I have strayed to some extent from the resolution. The Minister of Justice shakes his head. Well, perhaps there is something to be said in my defence in that regard, but I do say before I sit down that we who come from Saskatchewan appreciate the broad-minded manner in which the minister approached the special case of that province and of Manitoba, although I come from Saskatchewan and speak especially for Saskatchewan at the moment. The facts which the minister put on the record this afternoon relating to the surplus of representation of Ontario over Quebec, on the basis indicated, was something, I must say, to which I had not given consideration before. The minister thus makes a very strong case for the province of Saskatchewan at the moment and I was very glad to hear the case made.

We have lost from the prairies a large number of young people and older people as well

[Mr. Coldwell.]

who have moved away to the east and to the Pacific coast to work or serve in the war. I believe they will return to us, at any rate a large number of them. When that time comes there will be another census, and we can discuss this matter further at that time. What the minister has said this afternoon strengthens the position I have put before the house regarding our constitutional status, and the contention that we should have the right to decide our representation. This house should have the right to amend the constitution of the country in order to do anything that may be of vital necessity at any given time.

May I add one more word. I think there was a great deal in what the minister said about constituencies and the recollections they have of members who have represented them from time to time. At the moment I am thinking of Great Britain. When one thinks of William Ewart Gladstone, the great leader of British Liberalism, one automatically thinks of Midlothian, the Scottish constituency which he represented for so long. Even to those of us who would move forward more rapidly than some others in this house, there is something well worth while in associations of the past. The Minister of Justice mentioned his own constituency of Quebec East, so long represented by the distinguished Canadian who preceded him in the office he now holds; yet we have seen in other parts of Canada constituencies which had been held by men who have made a name in this house wiped out under redistribution. I am glad, therefore, to have the opportunity this afternoon of supporting the resolution introduced, although, as I say, it is rather jarring on my feelings that I have to support a resolution humbly praying another parliament to do the thing which we as a self-respecting, self-governing people ought to have the right to do ourselves.

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister): I wish at once to express my thanks to the leader of the opposition (Mr. Graydon) and the leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (Mr. Coldwell) for the indication they have given, that in their view the argument which has been presented for deferring redistribution at this time is one which not only commends itself to them but will, they believe, commend itself to the members of their following.

Mr. GRAYDON: Not all the arguments.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Well, the argument that it is not desirable to have a political controversy arise at this time, because of any attempt at redistribution in the present session of parliament, if it is possible to avoid it.