

Columbia River Agreement

long harangue of the Minister of Finance, that this matter was not discussed or disposed of last Friday, except in reference to the statement that General McNaughton made in Washington. General McNaughton came back to Canada Friday evening after the house had risen and at that time, according to the press, General McNaughton said, and I read from the press report:

General Andrew McNaughton, stoking more fuel on his charge of a power sell-out to the United States over the Columbia river has said Prime Minister Diefenbaker is a "dictator"—

That statement has been denied, but that was not mentioned in the House of Commons because it had not been made when the committee was sitting.

Mr. Harkness: It is too ridiculous to be mentioned.

Mr. Pearson: It might not be ridiculous in the country.

The other point was that the Prime Minister had indicated that ratification has to be discussed in the House of Commons. Well, of course, that is not true. The Prime Minister ought to know that ratification is an executive act and has nothing whatever to do with the House of Commons. As the Prime Minister, who is an old parliamentarian, should know, ratification is not a matter for decision in the House of Commons. It has become a convention of our constitution that the House of Commons should examine and approve matters of importance which require ratification by the government. When I asked the Prime Minister if these matters would be considered and approved in the House of Commons during this session before ratification, the Prime Minister said no.

Mr. Diefenbaker: No, no.

Mr. Pearson: I asked him if these matters would be submitted to a committee for consideration.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pearson: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that this treaty, before ratification, should go before the committee on external affairs. If it is not considered by a committee—

Mr. Diefenbaker: What treaties, when you were in office, did you send before a committee?

Mr. Pearson: The Prime Minister, who is afraid to look at the present or the future, begins to look far back. I tell the Prime Minister that the committee on external affairs considered every important treaty while we were in office.

Mr. Jones: The Liberals are running from the past.

[Mr. Pearson.]

Some hon. Members: Nonsense.

Mr. Pearson: The Prime Minister has said this treaty will not go to the House of Commons during this session; that is one matter relevant to the necessity for discussing this subject right now. The Minister of Finance also said that all these matters were discussed last Friday, irrespective of what General McNaughton said when he returned Friday evening and irrespective of the comments over the week end. The argument of the Minister of Finance is nonsense under the circumstances.

I am satisfied, therefore, you will appreciate that this is a reasonable motion and it should be admitted that we should discuss this matter now as a matter of grave importance.

Mr. Speaker: Reference has been made to the bringing before this house of the Columbia river treaty. The Leader of the Opposition has mentioned referring the question to the committee on external affairs. The Prime Minister referred to a question which appears at page 2020 of *Hansard* for March 21, 1962, which I take it is an assurance by the Prime Minister that the ratification of this house is considered necessary by the government before the treaty will be ratified.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That's right.

Mr. Speaker: Now, that may not be legally necessary, but I take it that is the statement. In order that the statement will be on the record I shall read the question and answer:

Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Prime Minister, in view of certain statements that have been made in recent days, whether he can give the house an assurance that the Columbia river development treaty with the United States will not be ratified until it has been discussed and approved in this house?

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. gentleman is fully aware of the fact that ratification by this house is necessary.

The Leader of the Opposition properly indicates that ratification, in law, may be made by the government without consideration by the house. However, I took the statement—and I have the Prime Minister's assurance that that is what he intends—to mean that the treaty will not be ratified without being brought before the house.

I approach the problem with that in my mind. In so far as the statement the Minister of Finance made is concerned that there had been discussion, I would not like to base a decision on that earlier discussion because, although it involved the same statement that creates the issue today, that discussion was on an item of northern affairs which did not involve the Columbia treaty directly. What