

*The Budget—Mr. Drew*

One of the things which must be so noticeable to those who have been following this subject with deep concern—and I believe that most of the members of this house have been doing so—is the change indicated in the attitude of the government in one year. Last year in his budget speech the Minister of Finance said that the arrangements being made by the government for certain tax concessions were, and I quote the words:

... in accordance with the principle that nothing in federal legislation shall in any way discriminate against a province which does not enter into a tax rental agreement. This is in line with the declared intention of the federal government that nothing should be done which could be interpreted as pressure, direct or indirect, on any province to accept or renew a tax rental agreement.

This year the attitude is very different. This year the mere failure to accept such an agreement is in itself justification for dealing at arm's length with those who take that point of view.

Mr. Speaker, this attitude has already produced the inevitable consequences. In different parts of Canada things have been said which are inclined to disturb those deep, strong, warm and friendly feelings of understanding which have been growing, improving and maturing in the years that have passed. I greatly regret some of the statements which have been made in different parts of Canada and which seem completely to ignore the possibility that there is a constitutional issue. At the same time may I say that I greatly regret that there are those who have suggested that the good faith of the English-speaking part of our population may in some way be placed in issue. Mr. Speaker, I hope that comments of that kind in any part of Canada can come to an end and that this issue, like others, can be discussed on the basis of the legal and fundamental points involved.

As an English-speaking Canadian may I say that no one in this house or in Canada has a deeper or firmer belief in the sanctity of the British North America Act than have I. On many occasions I have expressed my belief in the sanctity of that constitution. Others in our party have done so, as have others of the English-speaking members on the other side of the house. Only because I think it is important that no suggestion of this kind should be permitted to becloud the issue now before us, I want to place on record once again what I said in regard to this very subject some considerable time before it was my privilege to sit in the House of Commons. As premier of Ontario I had occasion to discuss this subject on April 1, 1947. I quote from the *Hansard* of the debates in the Ontario legislature, and I do so simply to show that this subject is not one which impresses the people of this

country only on the basis of their racial origin or of the part of the country in which they live. This was what I said on that occasion:

There are good reasons why the province of Quebec attaches special importance to the provisions of the British North America Act and is less likely to accept substantial changes which are made without the consent of that province and without adequate compensating protection, if any of their established rights are to be diminished. With good reason Quebec looks to the British North America Act as their guarantee of their own civil law, of their customs, of their language and their religion.

It would be well for all of us to keep in mind the reasons why those special rights were assured to the province of Quebec in 1867. The provisions of the British North America Act merely carried forward undertakings which were first given at the time of the capture of Quebec in 1759. Those undertakings were given statutory form in the Quebec Act of 1774 and repeated in the Constitutional Act of 1791.

It is not for anyone living in any other part of Canada today to question the wisdom of that decision. There can be little doubt that if those rights had not been granted the people of Quebec would have seen no good reason for not joining the other North American provinces which seceded and formed the United States, under the revolutionary war which began in 1775.

Nor is it likely that the soldiers of Quebec would have fought so gallantly and so successfully in the defence of British North America in the war of 1812-14 if the Constitutional Act had not reassured them of those rights in 1791, and in doing so gave them a good reason for remaining loyal to the British crown. In view of the fact that those rights have been undisturbed for nearly 200 years, there is no reason why the province of Quebec should accept any agreement which would have the effect of weakening their provincial government, and by centralizing financial power in the central government present the very real possibility of the establishment of a unitary government, in fact if not in name. If these deductions are correct, then those provinces which hope to maintain national unity will follow the course which it is possible for Quebec to follow as well. But, Mr. Speaker—

In that case, Mr. Speaker, I was addressing the Speaker of the Ontario legislature.

—in emphasizing the special reasons why Quebec would resist agreements which would weaken the federal structure and lead to centralization, I wish to leave no impression that it is Quebec alone which would be unwilling to lose control of its own local affairs. The people of Ontario are very properly jealous of their great traditions, and I do not believe that they would be willing to hand over the control within their province of their local customs, their administration of justice and their own long-established educational system.

That is what I said in April of 1947, seven years ago now, and some considerable time before I had any reason to consider the possibility that I might be here in this House of Commons. I hope these words, Mr. Speaker, will remove any possible suggestion that this is a subject which is only of interest to one province of Canada. This is a subject which is of interest to all Canadians, and I am sure the remarks I made about Ontario apply with equal force to other provinces of Canada. Certainly no Canadian expressed in clearer or