

Grants to Newfoundland

Mr. Pearson: May I ask the minister whether he ever discussed this interpretation of their responsibilities with any members of this royal commission?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I have refrained from doing so because I would not have considered it proper to do so.

Mr. Pearson: Why interpret then?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I think it is perfectly obvious to anyone who approaches this question with an open mind and with a desire to arrive at reasonable readings, reasonable interpretations and reasonable conclusions, instead of indulging in the kind of sophistry that was resorted to by some hon. members yesterday that they cannot make the word "thereafter"—

Mr. Pearson: What does it mean?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton):—by their contention, stretched and strained, to mean forever and forever.

Mr. Pearson: What does it mean?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): It means for such a period as was within the contemplation of those who drew this reference and those who were speaking for Newfoundland when they said this was not for an indefinite period.

Mr. Pearson: What period was it? One year?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): That would be something having regard to the financial situation which is precisely the matter which the undertaking given yesterday and now inscribed in the recitals in this bill makes clear provision for. This is a sensible way of dealing with this matter; and having regard to the desire on the part of this government for good relations between Newfoundland and all parts of this country, what we are doing here is not only sensible and reasonable but it is also the way which, in the long run, will most effectively contribute to establishing a sense of fairness in the dealings between Canada and the province of Newfoundland.

This is not a matter that should be pre-judged now in the way in which some hon. members for Newfoundland constituencies sought to judge it yesterday.

I remind them that this article 29 has been quite obviously oversold. It has been subjected to interpretations which that term never could have borne in the minds of those who are prepared to read it carefully and interpret it properly. If those words used by Mr. St. Laurent—

Mr. Pickersgill: May I ask a question?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): May I just finish? If those words used by Mr. St. Laurent in this house in February, 1949 had been carried with this article to the minds of those who have sought to place upon that article an impossible interpretation, then I am quite satisfied that this clause would not have been subjected to all the strains, to the overselling and to the misunderstanding to which it has obviously been subjected since. I therefore think the house is justified in receiving this bill as a constructive proposal for dealing with this problem in a manner that assures to Newfoundlanders that when this period of fixed, determined payments expires they have the assurance that in the review, which has already been initiated, of fiscal relations between the dominion and the provinces the special circumstances relating to the financial position of the province of Newfoundland after March 31, 1962, would in the language of this bill, be taken into consideration.

Mr. Pickersgill: The minister indicated that he would permit a question. The question that I should like to put to the minister is this. By whom does he consider that article 29 was oversold? Was it by the author?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I think it is quite apparent, from statements which the hon. member himself has made, that he is one of those who have oversold or been oversold in the interpretation of this article. For correction of his misinterpretation I direct him to the language that Mr. St. Laurent used in this house in February, 1949, language which I quoted yesterday.

We accept the interpretation that Mr. St. Laurent put upon this article at that time. It is crystal clear. It is not to be perverted and it is not to be watered down in the manner in which evidently some hon. members would like to see it watered down. Here I place the essential part of it, not the total portion which I read yesterday but the essential part, once more on record, and I would like to say to the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Pearson) that I do not think he was forthright yesterday in dealing with it. If the Leader of the Opposition accepts the interpretation which was placed on this article by Mr. St. Laurent speaking in this house on February 7, 1949, then I say to him that he cannot reassert some of the propositions which he put before the house yesterday. Here is Mr. St. Laurent's interpretation which he put on this article, one which in my respectful submission is completely correct, not only correct in terms of law but in the spirit of it. It is the type of expression which would be re-echoed in