

Grants to Newfoundland

If the present premier of Newfoundland is in office then—which I hope he will not be, for the good of Newfoundland—he will be able to put forward in his own inimitable way, probably assisted by the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate who is so close to him, very good arguments as to why Newfoundland should continue to receive financial aid.

The action of this government in providing special Atlantic grants was a guarantee of the goodwill of this government toward Newfoundland and of its future attitude toward that province. Those grants amount to \$7,500,000 a year.

We heard the hon. member for Assiniboia speak of the poor housing and bad roads in Newfoundland. He said it was appalling to see the roads there. In contrast let me read one or two extracts from the budget speech of the minister of finance of Newfoundland. He said:

I think it will be universally agreed that the union of Newfoundland and Canada has been a very happy one, and a very successful one. You could almost count on the fingers of your two hands the number of persons in this province today who do not share the universal view.

In the final paragraph he made another interesting statement. Before I read this part I want to remind the house that an hon. gentleman yesterday read extracts from the report of the royal commission to the effect that the commission found that there had been very little improvement in public services in the first eight years following confederation. Now listen to the final paragraph of the speech of the provincial finance minister:

And so, Mr. Speaker, we have seen ten years of confederation. We have seen ten years of steady and in some respects spectacular success. Newfoundland is beyond all comparison healthier, richer and happier than she ever was before. We are better fed, better clothed, better housed than we ever were. We have more roads, more cars, more electric light, more of almost everything than we had ten years ago.

Those are the words of Mr. Spencer, the minister of finance of Newfoundland. If the commission found that very little change had taken place in the province in the first eight years, then our government must get the credit for all of the progress made. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that every member of this house rejoices in the progress that has been related by the Newfoundland minister of finance, and I am quite sure that everyone, even the members of the opposition, recognize in their hearts that we have contributed most substantially and made the greatest contribution to that progress and to that happy state described by the minister of finance.

In Labrador, the government of Newfoundland still has rights left, rights to royalties,

not rights to timber, water power or minerals, but rights to royalties from those companies which are exploiting the minerals there. In the very near future Newfoundland expects large revenues from those royalties. We hope that soon materializes; we hope the progress described will continue and we believe that with the help of our government Newfoundland will have a greater and a happier future than any of the members of the opposition ever dreamed of.

Mr. C. W. Carter (Burin-Burgee): Mr. Speaker, I cannot conscientiously support the principle of this bill because if I did I believe I would be acting as a traitor not only to the people of Newfoundland but to the people of mainland Canada as well since today, in so far as this question is concerned, their integrity and their honour rest in our hands. My reasons for saying this are as follows: In the first place, this bill is a part of the Canadian constitution but its principle is to destroy one of the constitutional rights of Newfoundland, a right which was the determining factor that caused Newfoundland to agree to become a part of Canada. It removes the substance from our constitution and substitutes a shadow in its place.

I was not only surprised, I was shocked, to hear the Minister without Portfolio, the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Browne), say that the legal obligations of our constitution have been fulfilled in this bill. How can a legal obligation be fulfilled by a bill which destroys one of our rights under the constitution of Canada? And if there is no legal obligation, what about the moral obligation? Is that not important, to the hon. member for St. John's West? Term 29 no longer exists when this bill is passed and in its place we shall have a vague promise of a review that will take place some time after March 31, 1962 and which will take into consideration the special circumstances of Newfoundland.

One may well ask, if the guarantees contained in the constitution of Canada itself have no value, what worth can be placed on any assurance given in this bill? In this respect the principle of the bill is contrary to the principle of the constitution itself—the British North America Act, of which this bill is a part, since it finalizes the union of Newfoundland with Canada. Not only is the principle of this bill contrary to that of the constitution but it violates the spirit of the constitution in that it terminates by unilateral action a solemn agreement between two sovereign parties. The sins of the former Liberal government, recounted by the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) this afternoon, are no justification for that. Two wrongs can