

*The Address—Mr. Picard*

French Canada was safer in his hands than in those of the Prime Minister whom he called a "colonialist". It is the same line of attack as was hurled at Laurier in his own province in 1911. But let not my hon. friends be deluded. The people of Quebec have so greatly regretted the ingratitude they showed Laurier at that time that they will not be duped today. They have now learned their lesson, and they know that the men who are leading the two major parties now can be known to the country just by the way they have behaved in this house since we opened our deliberations. They can distinguish very well between the Prime Minister, who has shown himself to be a statesman of the first ability and of the first magnitude, and the leader of the opposition, who has tried at all times to raise prejudices and to bring about in Quebec a sentiment that would make him appear—after what he had said in the past—what he would very much like to be, the saviour of Quebec. It is a shame and a farce, and my hon. friends know it.

The method of amending the British North America Act, which has been criticized in this house during the recent debate, and which during the past two years has been made a political issue by the Conservative opposition, has been covered authoritatively by so many on this side of the house that I do not need to repeat their arguments. But, when they want to pose as saviours of minority rights and of provincial rights, it is interesting to note that of the ten amendments that have been made to the British North America Act, strange as it may seem, five have been brought in under a Conservative administration and five under a Liberal administration.

Of the five amendments under a Conservative administration, in no single case was the consent of the provinces obtained; yet today my hon. friends are trying to invoke the pretext that we should ask the provinces to approve of everything that is done in the house in the way of amendments to the constitution. In 1871 the question of establishing the western provinces arose, but nobody on the Conservative side in the house asked that the question be referred to the provinces. Halton and Mackenzie, both Liberals, asked as a first safeguard that the house should pronounce its views before any representations were sent to London. David Mills, another Liberal, representing the constituency of Bothwell at the time, asked that the provinces be consulted, but they were not, and that was under a Conservative regime. In 1886 the question of representation of the territories came up and the Conservatives did not consult the provinces. Another important question came up in 1915. Hon. members will

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say that I previously referred to matters dealt with long ago, but 1915 was not so long ago, and my hon. friends were in power. An amendment to the British North America Act was asked for to increase the number of senators and to provide for Newfoundland senators. That was a question exactly similar to the question of 1946, the redistribution of seats in this house, and yet no consultation was held, and none of the provinces were asked to consent. The same thing happened in 1916 when the question of lengthening the term of parliament was under discussion. There was no question then of having the consent of the provinces. My hon. friends will say that that was during the war and that we had to do it by act of parliament. But we, the Liberal party, went twice to the people during the war and twice we were returned to power by the people of Canada.

It is also to be remembered that when my hon. friends opposite discovered there was a question of provincial rights it was in 1946 when the question of allowing more equitable representation to Quebec came up. Those who claim to be the friends of Quebec today will say, of course, that it is just a coincidence. It is evidently just a coincidence that they suddenly took such care for the welfare of the provinces when the government had decided to establish representation in the house according to population. It is to be noted that this bill corrected a grave injustice as far as Quebec is concerned and gave that province eight more seats. Could it be that the concern of the hon. gentlemen opposite for the rights of the provinces sprang from a desire to have this bill submitted for the approval of all provincial legislatures and thus prevent its coming into force? Is it not within the scope of normal deduction to believe that the then premier of Ontario would have opposed the bill giving eight seats to a province upon which he had been showering aspersions barely two years before?

I am willing to let impartial students of history decide whether this great concern for provincial rights did not come exactly from the opposite intention, that of preventing Quebec from getting its due proportional representation.

At this point I think it is opportune that I make my stand clear as to the advisability of Canada having a constitution more in keeping with its dignity as a sovereign state, member of the council of nations. I have already expressed my views in this house. I did so in July, 1946, and I refer hon. members to pages 2482 and 2483 of *Hansard* of that year, where I said:

A constitution is the basic and most important feature of legislation that any country may enact.