

The Budget—Mr. Lesage

I suggest to you, sir, that no exchange of correspondence could have made it clearer that the whole matter of the relations, both on the particular matters and on the broad general scale, between the dominion and the provinces which were the subject of discussion at the dominion-provincial constitutional conference, is made dependent upon reaching an agreement on fiscal relations between the dominion and the provinces. Indeed, sir, it is difficult for me to understand how any agreement with respect to over-all constitutional amendments, modification or any other aspect of the constitution whatsoever could be reached without some discussion of their impact on the financial arrangements. And since the one is again dependent upon the other, and since the Prime Minister of Canada has issued such glowing statements as to the progress made in the one field and as to the prospects of success in the future with respect to that field, and since the Minister of Justice, as it were, practically staked the whole success of his political career upon repatriating the Canadian constitution, to use his own words, I must confess that I am unable to understand what excuse this government finds for its complete, its continued, its obstinate, and its deliberate failure to invite the provinces to meet with it since December, 1950, to continue those discussions.

I hope, sir, that you regard with equal seriousness to that which I regard it and with which I know every hon. member in all parties regard it, the desirability of reaching agreement on a method of amending Canada's constitution here in Canada. It is a matter to which the Prime Minister referred in a "Nation's Business" broadcast, a broadcast to all the Canadian people in 1951. It is a matter to which he referred again in the course of his election campaign tour of 1953 in the city of Vancouver, and I dare say elsewhere. It is a matter to which the Prime Minister attached the greatest of importance when it suited the political convenience of the moment and of the Liberal party and of the hon. gentleman to do so. But it appears to be a matter which, when it comes to be a concrete problem to be grasped and dealt with in the interests of the whole Dominion of Canada and in the interests of preserving the constitutional relationships of the Dominion of Canada, the hon. gentlemen are more concerned with their political advantage than they are with the national welfare.

Then, as now, they seek to temporize, to procrastinate and to dissimulate with regard to this matter, because they realize that if

they grasp the nettle it may sting. The Liberal party, which has always been prepared to set its own particular partisan interests above those of the nation, is not prepared to be stung. But, sir, I suggest to you that this is an issue upon which it is necessary to take a national rather than a partisan point of view. For the reasons which I have advanced, and the quotations that I have placed on the record, I believe we are quite within our rights in saying that this government owes it as a bounden duty to the Canadian people to take up this matter where they left off in September, 1950, and to call the provinces around the table to meet with them under the continued chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Canada, and make a real national effort, rising above narrow party considerations, to solve the problem and find a basis upon which all the provinces and the dominion can go forward again in harmony and unity.

(Translation):

Hon. Jean Lesage (Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources): Mr. Speaker, in rising to take part in this debate I do wish it to be clear that I am neither dissimulating nor procrastinating, as the hon. member for Kamloops (Mr. Fulton) has accused the members of the government and its supporters of doing. On the contrary, in the time at my disposal, I would like to discuss financial relations between the federal government and the provinces. This problem, as he has said himself, by the way, has been a most difficult one for several years. Events which occurred in the province of Quebec in recent weeks have added to its seriousness.

Like the hon. member for Kamloops I think that this matter must be dealt with from a national point of view. But we must remain realistic and deal with this problem as it is, and in the light of present circumstances. I am sincerely convinced that the calling of a federal-provincial conference to examine the rights granted by the constitution would not bring about an immediate solution to the problem with which a large number of residents of the province of Quebec are now faced. The problem for these people is an immediate one, and it is with that matter particularly that I would like to deal, within the larger framework of federal-provincial financial relations in the whole of Canada.

Since it is now nearly ten o'clock I would like to move that the debate be adjourned.