

ciple. The government should not have to apply to London. London was not a party to the confederation. The contracting parties are the provinces which signed the British North America Act. Why were they not approached beforehand? Why are they not consulted? There are people who never stop advocating good understanding and national unity; but when the time comes to act they always act in the sense of misunderstanding and disunity. I ask the government what are you seeking in London? A concession? The exercise of a right? As for the Right Honourable Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King), where is he now? His ministers are doubtless anxiously awaiting his return. I had hoped, with so many others, that his long stay in London would have spared us this humiliating request to the British house, and that he would bring back with him the original draft of our constitution, which is kept over there.

We shall not be our true selves until we abolish appeals to the Privy Council, until we can amend our constitution without currying favour from anyone and until we can hoist a truly distinctive flag. But since it is so difficult in Canada to exercise the right of self-government, I feel it my duty to support the government on this measure, provided it manages our affairs without the interference of foreign countries. As all human laws, this one is imperfect. However, I wish to avoid that at some future time, it may be said that I did anything to decrease the influence of my province in this house. Time will improve this project. I endorse it as far as it is fair and beneficial for Quebec and all other provinces of the confederation. I also endorse it because if minorities were to forsake their rights, they would lose them irretrievably. In 1943, I opposed the delay in redistribution for the sake of the very principles on which our constitution is based. I foresaw a grave injustice to my province. I felt that our rights were infringed upon by such a delay. True, at that time, as at present, an amendment to the confederation act was contemplated. Ever since, we have suffered a real handicap because we did not have in this parliament, the full representation to which we were entitled. We are not overly surprised by the fact that, in this house, a group of politicians, ever the same, lead the fight against the claims of minorities. For over twenty years, I have been here a witness to this pitiable exhibition. However, this very same group of politicians claim to be the champions of right. I know them for having seen them at work. Champions of right they are not; rather pillars of the

[Mr. LaCombe.]

empire. I shall carefully avoid the path that leads directly to the forsaking of our rights to the advantage of those very men who never miss a chance of reproving, by gesture and word alike, any measure leading to a slightly fairer treatment of minorities or to a loosening of our colonial bonds. Although consultation with the provinces, on this matter, would have been preferable, I shall support the motion in the interest of the province of Quebec, whose influence should increase in every part of Canada and more particularly in the House of Commons. I want justice for all, with true respect for provincial autonomy and representation. All should be treated alike. The number of members elected to parliament should be according to the population of the country, I also want all Canadians to possess those qualities of fair-mindedness and patriotism without which we can never be a great nation.

The hon. member for Lake Centre (Mr. Diefenbaker) made a masterly speech. But although he opened to our view some splendid vistas, he kept in the dark others even more imposing. He recalled for our benefit the solemn statements of men who made Canada famous both nationally and internationally; but even though they were builders in many spheres of our political and social life, they failed to achieve that which has eluded us since confederation, that is, to make Canada free and independent with regard to both her foreign and domestic policies and create a Canadian mentality capable of withstanding the assaults of colonialism and imperialism. During my lengthy career, I have fought on so many constitutional issues that, looking back into the past, considering the present and peering into the future, I wonder whether we shall ever be able to proclaim ourselves a nation. How difficult it is to call ourselves Canadians in this country! Shall we always follow in the wake of the empire? A few days ago I heard in this house invidious words during the debate on Canadian citizenship. A few moments ago I heard similar utterances in connection with our constitution. When shall we be able to hold up our heads and assert ourselves? When shall we be in a position to amend our own constitution without requesting any permission from London? Everywhere our actions stamp us as an immature nation. We are a country without a flag and I would even say without a constitution, since our constitution does not belong to us. It cannot be called ours. We have no right to use it as we see fit. London has the first say in regard to Canada's constitution. The British House of Commons may say to Canada: "Hands off this docu-