

*The Budget—Mr. Fulton*

meetings since 1950. He also admitted that the dominion government has issued no invitations since 1950 for any further meetings of the conference, and that he had however received suggestions from some of the provinces that there should be further meetings. Those suggestions were received in inquiries from the premier of Alberta and from the premier of Saskatchewan. In substantiation of that, there was tabled in the house on April 8, as sessional paper No. 209, copies of correspondence exchanged between the premiers of Alberta and Saskatchewan and certain ministers of the present government.

What happened was that on July 12, 1951, the premier of Alberta wrote to the Prime Minister of Canada referring to a press report of the Prime Minister's "Nation's Business" broadcast, in which the Prime Minister said as follows:

We are actively striving to work out with the provincial authorities a suitable method of making here in Canada any amendment which may be required in the future, to our own constitution.

It would be interesting to hear from the Prime Minister what he regards as being encompassed within the words "actively striving to work out." Will the Minister of Justice tell us; will the Prime Minister tell us; will the Minister of Finance tell us what active efforts have been made by the government since 1950 to work out this suitable method of amending our own constitution here in Canada? Will any of the hon. gentlemen tell us what active efforts have been made by them in this or in any other field of dominion-provincial relations to meet with the provinces and work out any method of agreement whatsoever? Will they tell us what active efforts are being made to meet the reasonable requests of the premier of the province of British Columbia in this or in any other field? Will the minister tell us what has caused him to abandon so entirely his position that until he had repatriated the Canadian constitution we were somehow or other labouring under the shackles of outmoded colonialism, as they have pointed out so enthusiastically? What is the reason for the great change in attitude between September, 1950 and April, 1954?

This is what the Prime Minister said in 1951: They were actively striving to work out with the provincial authorities a suitable method of amending the constitution here in Canada, and the premier of Alberta, I think with a pardonable and understandable curiosity, inquired as follows:

I would be interested to know if this statement indicates that you propose to reconvene shortly the dominion-provincial conference on constitutional matters. It is our sincere hope that this may be

[Mr. Fulton.]

the case. We feel that no time should be lost in finding a satisfactory method of amending our own constitution in Canada.

Well, sir, that received a polite acknowledgment from Mr. J. W. Pickersgill, special assistant to the Prime Minister, a gentleman who has since been translated into another capacity, in which he remains singularly silent on this matter. I hope that when he returns from his undoubted well-earned Easter holiday he will also enter into this matter, and with the advantage of the great background which he has acquired behind the scenes he will be willing to stand up in front of the curtains and enlighten us on all the difficulties which have since beset the dominion government and have persuaded it that it would no longer be profitable even to meet with the provinces around the table to try to work out a solution. However, this Mr. J. W. Pickersgill acknowledged the letter from Mr. Manning and told him:

I am sending the letter on to Mr. St. Laurent at his summer home in St. Patrick, where he is hoping to spend most of the rest of this month.

And that, Mr. Speaker, was the extent of the satisfaction which Mr. Manning got out of this whole matter until some months later, in September, 1951, when there is a very interesting letter written to Mr. Manning, following upon the fact that the premier of Saskatchewan had made a similar inquiry as to whether and when this conference might be reconvened. After having discussed the matter on the telephone with the premier of Saskatchewan, the Minister of Justice wrote a letter to Mr. Manning dated September 6, in which he said this:

I believe with you, and feel sure that Mr. Douglas does also, that the best chance of achieving success in the solution of this problem lies in continuing the discussions that were commenced last year.

Some chance, in view of the complete inactivity of the Minister of Justice over the three-year period since the letter. However, he continued, there were certain reasons why it might not be convenient to have it at that particular moment. Then he said:

Moreover, we have a feeling here, which is shared by Premier Douglas and also by the attorneys general of two other provinces with whom I was conversing today, that we shall probably be able to make more progress in the conference on constitutional amendment after the outstanding fiscal matters relating particularly to the dominion-provincial tax agreements have been cleared up. We think, and in this we are confirmed by the views of several provinces, that it would be wiser to delay the reconvening of the dominion-provincial conference on constitutional amendment until after agreement has been reached between the dominion and the provinces with regard to the matters which were under discussion at the dominion-provincial conference on fiscal relations.