

British North America Act

Mr. Diefenbaker: Yes. He spoke of a reduction in taxation. Certainly no government in so short a time has increased taxation on so many.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Diefenbaker: They talk about reducing taxes. If the Minister of Trade and Commerce were not in Saskatoon trying to sell a second class product today to the people of that city in my province, I would refer to the fact that they pointed out that a sales tax on building materials would increase the cost of construction. He apparently did not want anything of that. This is before Mitchell Sharp, the economist of 1950, became Minister of Trade and Commerce in the government of 1964.

It has been, Mr. Speaker, an interesting study in the course of manipulation in planning, a sinuous course which has been followed by this government and which now culminates in the application of something which each and every one of those who sit opposite and talked about it said was unnecessary, namely an amendment. Mr. Speaker, you are not surprised, you are not shocked, you are not disturbed. You have seen so much of this in the last 14 months that you would be surprised, shocked and disturbed were the government not to follow this course in this case, as in so many others. We thought we had touched bottom with changes, alterations, withdrawals and retreats one after the other as this government brought in some measure or other, advanced it to the house and then took it away again to be amended. Take for example the pension plan, which was brought in with a blare of trumpets and then taken back to the workshop of the minister of health and welfare even before it got on the road. Then it was found that it would not operate and the government produced another plan. Then they found that would not operate. As I was saying, we thought we had touched bottom, but this government has shown unfathomed depths in its incapacity in this case as in so many others.

What will be next, Mr. Speaker? We said 14 months ago that this amendment was necessary. At that time we did not have the same minister of justice. That minister of justice has gone to another reward; I do not know whether that was because of his opinion given in 1964 that a constitutional amendment was not necessary. I am sure the present minister would never have agreed with that, otherwise we would not have this measure before us today.

What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that this is the kind of dawdling and playing around which has characterized this government. I was in Saskatoon yesterday—I notice my absence was noted—and I think the harvest looks pretty hopeful. I found the people there talking about this pension plan, and they are starting to ask when they will get it. You remember, Mr. Speaker, immediately after the election the old pensioner who thought he was going to get an extra \$10, but who found that the government would not act until we forced them by moving an amendment. This plan which will be brought in—providing there is not yet another change—will not be in effect for a long while. Payments will start, as I recall it, in 1966; contributions will start earlier. When the government brings in this legislation I think they should widen the powers for which they are now asking in the amendment so as to cover additional possibilities which may arise in the future.

As far as this amendment is concerned, we support it. We said that it was necessary in 1962, when this contention was ridiculed by those opposite. I am not going to clutter the record by repeating the loud denials of the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Martin), or the lesser ones of the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson), or of other ministers, this galaxy who today occupy the front benches of the government. I would simply point out this—and it cannot be denied—that what they said was unnecessary is today the necessity which we said it was. When this amendment is passed, as I am sure it will be, and Westminster makes it law, we can thereby proceed to start to retrieve the loss of 14 months caused by the incapacity and stubborn tenacity with which this government bulled its way ahead, bringing in plans for parliament which were ineffective, ill-born, or at least ill-conceived. After 14 months what we said was necessary then is now being done.

We support this amendment and welcome the fact that it is being brought in now. I conclude where I began, namely by saying, what a commentary this is. When the front benchers of this government talk in such stentorian tones of what they are doing to bring about national symbols and national unity, while at the same time bringing about symbols of national disunity, we have to go to Westminster and say, "Will you please allow us to amend our constitution?" Not because this is what Westminster wants, but