

to the Minister of Justice; I ask them in the interests of all Canadians to conceive it to be their duty to drop the motion for the previous question and the motion before the chair.

Mr. D. K. HAZEN (St. John-Albert): Mr. Speaker, after listening this afternoon to the Minister of Justice (Mr. St. Laurent), I concluded that the consent of the provincial governments or legislatures had not been obtained to the amendment to the British North America Act proposed by this resolution. If I am not correct in that conclusion, the Minister of Justice can correct me. If I am correct, I think some explanation is due to the members of this house and to the country as to why this consent was not obtained. All the provinces are interested, and in my opinion they should have been consulted. Before an amendment was made to the British North America Act to establish a system of unemployment insurance, the consent of the provinces was obtained. But nothing of that kind has been done on this occasion.

I do not think this is the proper time to have redistribution; I do not think it would be fair to some of the western provinces, but I rise this evening to place myself on record as being opposed to any amendment to the British North America Act unless the provincial legislatures have agreed to such amendment. Any amendment to the British North America Act should involve the approval of the legislature of each province. I intend to support the resolution, but I do so upon the understanding that it creates no precedent as far as further amendments to the British North America Act are concerned.

Mr. LIONEL BERTRAND (Terrebonne) (Translation): Mr. Speaker, the resolution we are requested to pass does not meet with my approval and I must admit frankly that I cannot countenance it. Here are my reasons. In 1867 the British North America Act fixed at 65 the number of members for the province of Quebec. Besides, the same legislation states that the other provinces will be entitled to as many constituencies as the number of times their population is divisible by one sixty-fifth of that of the province of Quebec.

This clause was included in the Confederation pact in order to safeguard the rights of Quebec as compared to the other provinces and ensure that it would be fairly represented in Parliament. If the population of Quebec should increase more rapidly than that of the other provinces in a ten-year period, it may

[Mr. Pouliot.]

well be that the representation of these be decreased, as on the contrary, it may increase if the population of Quebec should experience an appreciable decrease.

The British North America Act specifies that the representation shall be adjusted following every tenth-year census. A census has been taken in 1941; according to the constitution the readjustment of representation should take place before the next general election.

However, the government, in the resolution now before the house, request that this readjustment be postponed until after the end of the war. As main arguments in favour of its resolution the government state that we are at war and that such a readjustment in war-time would inevitably cause dissension.

I still believe, Mr. Speaker, that the war should not be an excuse or a pretext for the establishment of a precedent or for any abuse. Time and again, I have protested in this house against the tendency of the government, under pretext of the state of war, to alter or amend our parliamentary set-up. The readjustment is to be made following the census taken every ten years. It has been taken during the war. Why have not the government, at that time, thought of postponing it? Since the census has been taken why should the readjustment of representation be postponed? It had been announced in the speech from the throne, on January 28. On May 14th last the Right Hon. Prime Minister informed the house that this measure would be brought down in the course of the present session. Exactly a month later, the Right Hon. Prime Minister announced the intention of the government of having the constitution amended so as to postpone until the end of the war the readjustment of representation. Why this change in policy?

Any amendment to the constitution would establish a dangerous precedent, even in war-time. Besides, the constitution should be amended only in cases of absolute necessity. Furthermore, the readjustment of representation bill does not affect our war effort, either directly or indirectly, but is purely and simply an administrative affair.

The government fear that this readjustment may cause serious dissensions. This could not possibly be the case in Quebec, for that province may have neither more nor less than 65 constituencies. The protests could be based only on the alteration of the boundaries of existing constituencies and the government could, very wisely, avoid these, for reasons of war emergency. On account of