

I come now to Quebec. The leader of the opposition has quoted from the letter received from Premier Duplessis. He is quite right in saying that in his letter of December 30, 1937, Mr. Duplessis expressed in very general terms his willingness to cooperate in what he described as a sound and fair system of unemployment insurance, which could be established on a national scope, without infringing upon the rights and autonomy of the provinces. But that was not the only reference made by Premier Duplessis to the request made by the dominion government for the cooperation of the provinces in this matter. Broadly speaking, Mr. Duplessis took the ground, very soon after that letter was sent, that the request made by the dominion government was an encroachment upon provincial autonomy.

This whole question has been discussed today in a spirit of moderation, and I do not propose to depart from that in what I am now going to say. At the same time, surely it is preposterous to suggest that a courteous request for cooperation for the national good is an encroachment upon provincial autonomy.

Mr. MANION: Would the minister mind telling us where Mr. Duplessis took that attitude?

Mr. ROGERS: If my hon. friend will permit me I shall do so. I have a number of clippings before me, but I shall select only two. I shall quote from a report of a delegation representing large bodies of workers in the province of Quebec which met Premier Duplessis. This was a delegation from the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, and the report reads:

Premier Duplessis reiterated his stand against any constitutional amendment to set up the insurance plan.

He declared the Quebec government was "ready to cooperate with Ottawa" to establish insurance but would forsake "none of its rights to do so."

"We are not going to be assimilated by the federal government, and while I am premier that will not be done through any sacrifice of provincial rights," the premier asserted.

Mr. MANION: That is not any contradiction of his letter. I think in justice to Mr. Duplessis, his whole letter should be placed on *Hansard*. After all, it is the official correspondence.

Mr. ROGERS: With the consent of the house, I am quite ready to have the letter from Mr. Duplessis placed on *Hansard*. The letter reads:

[Mr. Rogers.]

Quebec, December 30, 1937.

Right Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King,
P.C., LL.D., K.C.,
Prime Minister of Canada,
House of Commons,
Ottawa.

My dear Premier:

Your answer to my letter dated November 22nd was handed to me on the day of your departure for your recent holidays and I preferred to await your return before replying.

In your second letter, you repeat the views you expressed in your first one, adding that you are convinced that enabling or concurring legislation would be uncertain and unstable.

Old age pensions—one of the many similar instances—which you enacted and enforced and which was approved and amended by your successors in office, a few years later, is based on enabling legislation.

Moreover, as stated previously, there are also other ways of realizing unemployment insurance which would safeguard provincial autonomy. If enabling legislation, as you declare, is uncertain and unstable, what do you think of the stability and certainty of a federal legislation on unemployment insurance which could essentially be changed or modified, every year, by the federal parliament?

The government of the province of Quebec considers that the best elements of stability and certainty are within the British North America Act and that it is much safer to preserve the stability of the constitution.

In conclusion, again I state that the province of Quebec is willing to cooperate heartily in the establishment of a sound and fair system of unemployment insurance, which could be established on a national scope, without infringing upon the rights and autonomy of the provinces.

Yours very truly,

M. L. Duplessis.

My point is that this matter was subsequently brought before Mr. Duplessis by a delegation of workers in the province of Quebec. Mr. Duplessis and others have referred to it in the course of political addresses, and I do not think I am misinterpreting the situation when I say that there has been a definite attempt to interpret this request on the part of the dominion government as an encroachment upon provincial autonomy. It has been my point, and I press it again, that there has been no coercion. There has been merely a courteous request which was addressed in identical terms to all the provinces to bring about legislation which we believe would be for the general good and which, after all, was designed not to impose a further burden upon the provinces, but rather to relieve the provinces of burdens which they now have to bear. That was the actual situation.

It is true that Premier Duplessis has taken the ground that the province of Quebec would be willing to cooperate in some scheme in which provincial administration would be retained intact, but there has been no development of that idea to the extent which would