

*The Budget—Mr. Fulton*

Then the premier of Manitoba continued:

I am optimistic and we from Manitoba have always been optimistic as to the eventual outcome of this and other conferences.

Then the premier of Prince Edward Island expressed himself to the same effect. They all paid tribute to the work done by the Prime Minister of Canada and by the Minister of Justice in advancing the work of that conference. The conference closed on September 28, at which time a press statement was issued containing the following:

The conference has had a full and frank discussion of the principles applicable to such a general amending procedure and has reached agreement on many of them. Its members are unanimously of the opinion that substantial progress has been made and are exceedingly gratified at the spirit of harmony and co-operation which has been shown by all delegates throughout the whole of the proceedings.

May I remind the house that this conference was held at the invitation of the government of that province, in the city of Quebec. The press release goes on to say:

The conference has requested the continuing committee of attorneys general to study the proposals which it received with a view to arriving at an amending procedure satisfactory to all governments concerned. The continuing committee met today in the late afternoon and agreed that the provincial attorneys general and the Minister of Justice would exchange views by correspondence leading up to a meeting to be held at Ottawa on November 13, 1950 in order that the matters referred to it might be further considered and a report prepared for submission to a third plenary session of the constitutional conference to be held immediately after the federal-provincial conference on fiscal and other matters which is to meet in Ottawa on December 4, 1950.

The continuing committee has also been authorized to study the methods and techniques whereby a Canadian constitution can be domiciled in Canada as a purely Canadian instrument.

There I can read between the lines the fine Italian hand of the Minister of Justice, harking back to his oft-repeated shibboleth of repatriation of the Canadian constitution, liberating Canada from the shackles of colonialism. I wish the Minister of Justice would set himself occasionally to tasks which are important with the same realism and energy as, in the days of 1950, he set himself to this imaginary task of the liberation of Canada from those hypothetical and entirely imaginary chains which he thinks bound her. And I must say the Minister of Justice has not shown the same ambition, energy and zeal since 1950 which he showed in those well-worded and high-sounding press releases which followed the conference in September of 1950.

Because nothing—absolutely nothing—has happened since—not one thing. Nothing has resulted from this conference, which started off in such a blaze of glory and which dissolved on September 28, 1950 with so many

high-sounding words, so many promises of progress for the future. Whether or not there was a meeting on November 13, 1950, as was arranged by the continuing committee, I have been unable to find out. But I do know that on December 4 the federal and provincial governments met again in conference in Ottawa, and issued this statement to the press, as it is reported at page 137 of the proceedings of that conference. The statement bears the following heading, "Statement to the press by the Right Hon. Louis S. St. Laurent at the conclusion of the conference", and states:

The conference discussed:

1. The offer of the federal government for new tax agreements;
2. The offer of the federal government respecting old age security;
3. A provincial proposal for an amendment to the constitution to permit the provincial legislatures to levy an indirect sales tax at the retail level.

The press release goes on to set out the proposals in four short paragraphs, the concluding two of which are as follows:

And that the provincial governments would consider the proposal for new tax agreements and indicate their respective positions at a later date. It was also decided to suspend the further deliberations of the federal-provincial conference on constitutional amendment and of its continuing committee of attorneys general pending consideration of the tax agreements and related matters. Once these have been disposed of, the committee of attorneys general will resume its deliberations at the earliest convenience of the federal and provincial governments.

And that was the end of that conference. Since that time—since December of 1950—we have had nothing but a deep, dark and abysmal silence. The Minister of Justice apparently has abandoned his zeal and his energy. Perhaps he feels that notwithstanding the lack of progress he is nevertheless a good Canadian. I hope he feels he is. I hope he feels he does not labour under any disability because he has not bothered to reconvene this conference. I hope he also realizes to the full that the failure to reconvene this conference is now bedevilling the Canadian constitutional picture and the relationship between the dominion and the provinces to a point where there is grave danger to the whole of the Canadian confederation.

I say that, Mr. Speaker, because the Minister of Justice himself has tied in the whole of the fiscal arrangements between the dominion and the provinces with these constitutional conferences, by the exchange of correspondence which he himself tabled in the house the other day. The Minister of Justice admitted in the answers to questions quite recently that he was in fact appointed chairman of the continuing committee; that his appointment had never been revoked, and that the continuing committee has held no