

Columbia River Treaty

possible to persuade members of the house who remain critical that this is a good treaty. I was interested in the remarks made by the Prime Minister yesterday in response to a question asked concerning the petition of protest by eminent engineers in this country which was presented to the Prime Minister within recent days. The replies indicated that at least three of those distinguished engineers had changed their minds since signing their names to the petition. I recall the interjection of the Secretary of State for External Affairs that he anticipated there would be further withdrawals from the petition, and I am wondering whether there have been such further withdrawals since yesterday. Could the Secretary of State for External Affairs answer that question, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): I think there have been. I will let my hon. friend know.

Mr. Dinsdale: The Secretary of State for External Affairs indicates that there have been further withdrawals. When you can convince men with the engineering qualifications that were indicated in the information given to the house—Mr. Thomson of Calgary Power, for example, who is an outstanding hydro engineer—that there has been certain misunderstanding concerning the treaty even at this late date, I am sure it is still possible in the course of this discussion to convert a few of the unbelievers.

Mr. Byrne: Don't be too sure.

Mr. Dinsdale: I think the greatest conversion, however, was that of the Secretary of State for External Affairs himself; because during the three years this treaty has been under discussion he himself has come to embrace the viewpoint of the former administration that this is an essentially good, basically sound treaty for the government and the people of Canada.

We spent some time in the committee discussions considering this particular point, and I am not going to rehash the discussion at this time. It is to be found in the voluminous evidence for posterity for those who wish to pursue the subject. But I was interested in getting clarification on this point because I had some slight part in the early negotiation. I think it was demonstrated to the satisfaction of all concerned that the treaty was basically sound and good, and the protocol, on which a great deal of emphasis has been placed by the new administration, was merely a clarification of the principles that had been laid down by this treaty.

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

I say, Mr. Speaker, that this represents a very significant conversion indeed, because if we were to rehash the record—and I have it before me—we could indicate that the Liberal party which now forms the administration—and I see the hon. member—

Mr. Byrne: There are conversions every day.

Mr. Dinsdale: —for Kootenay East (Mr. Byrne) smiling at me because he knows what I am talking about at the moment—we could put on the record the strong opposition that the Liberal party, when it was in opposition, took against the treaty that had been negotiated by the former Conservative administration. As I listened to the statements by members of the New Democratic party it seemed to me that the position they take now is very similar to the position the Liberal party took when it was in opposition.

Mr. Herridge: That is correct.

Mr. Dinsdale: The members of the New Democratic party still have not been converted to the viewpoint that this is a basically sound treaty. The amendment they put forward yesterday indicates, I think, that they take an attitude very similar to that adopted by the Liberal party when it was in opposition; they want every "i" dotted and every "t" crossed so as to spell out the specific details of the program. This is what the Liberal party, when it became the government, attempted to do in the protocol. It wanted certain points refined and certain ambiguities eliminated. It seems to me this is precisely the position which is taken by the amendment which was put forward yesterday by the hon. member for Greenwood, because it referred to the negotiation of a further protocol or an exchange of letters clarifying the right of Canada to divert, and so on. In other words the hon. member wants to pinpoint a specific aspect of the problem.

This is a complex matter. All the engineering witnesses who appeared before the committee and who had anything to do with the negotiation of the treaty say that this is the most complex instrument which has ever been negotiated in the history of Canada. It is politically complex, it is scientifically complex, and it is quite impossible to spell out in infinite detail every minute aspect in this matter.

In negotiations between Ottawa and a provincial authority and Ottawa and the United States government there has to be a basis of mutual trust, confidence and faith. One could