

*Redistribution*

obscure, that since the question of redistribution had been mentioned in the speech from the throne the government would proceed with it at this session, before the expiration of the session? What happened between the time when the Prime Minister made that statement and the moment when this resolution appeared on the order paper? What was the reason for the change? How is it that no one doubted all along that before the expiration of the session the government would deal with the question of redistribution? I cannot understand it and nobody can. It is a mystery.

Coming to the resolution itself and the way in which it is drafted, I have a few words to say; but before doing so I would again ask the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice to table a copy of the solemn protest received from the Quebec government, not only on behalf of the French-speaking Canadians of Quebec, but on behalf of those people of Quebec whom they represent, whatever may be their race or religion.

In regard to the resolution I have a correction to make in the quotation of Doctor Skelton by the leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation party. Doctor Skelton appearing before the committee said that Canada was the only country in the world that could not amend its constitution. It is true, and it is not true. All dominions, with the exception of Canada, have the right to amend their own constitution. They were all subject to disallowance by the British government, as we are now. Therefore, what was the use of having power to amend the constitution when, on the other hand, the British government had the power of disallowance of any act passed by any such parliament of the dominions. An exception could be made with respect to Ireland, in these later years. But it is the only dominion where there is no right of disallowance. Therefore Doctor Skelton gave a superficial view of the constitutions of other dominions.

Now, to come to this resolution, the government of Canada proposes to go to the British government asking for an amendment of the constitution with respect to the holding of a redistribution. As one who at the request of the late Minister of Justice made a report on redistribution in each county of Quebec, covering the last eighty years, and who prepared a booklet used by that right hon. gentleman as well as by the hon. member for Richelieu-Vercheres (Mr. Cardin) when they discussed the matter with Conservative ministers at that time, I believe I have the right to protest against a move like this. I have also the right to protest against the way in which the resolution has been drafted.

[Mr. Pouliot.]

The other day while speaking, not about the British government but about His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen, I said I did not feel humble when speaking to them, through you, sir. I did not feel humble, although I do feel so at times. I did not feel humble, because I represent people I am proud of, and I believe that is the feeling of all hon. members elected for the various constituencies of this country. But I do not see the government of Canada, which is supposed to be on an equal footing with the British government, going humbly before the lords spiritual and temporal asking them to amend the constitution. I do not see them going humbly—and the Minister of Justice (Mr. St. Laurent) repeated that expression at the beginning of his speech—going humbly like the burgher of Calais, or like one of our colleagues who had to act humbly, and who had to repeat *flectamus genua* four times the other day before his withdrawal was accepted. I cannot agree with that. I cannot agree with it because I think we should have the dignity of an autonomous country within the empire. We should have the right to amend our constitution ourselves, as has been said so well by some hon. members. I do not see how we can go twice a year, or once a year to London to ask for an amendment to our constitution. What is our constitution worth, if it has to be changed like that every year? I admit that nothing is perfect in the constitution. But when Mr. Bennett stated that the constitution should be amended I asked him very often, "What part of the constitution do you wish to amend?" He could not answer me.

Last year the constitution was amended to permit the introduction of an unemployment measure. This year it will be amended to destroy a vital part of the British North America Act, a part which deals with representation in the House of Commons, the representation of a group of men who must have their say in our deliberations, and who must have no fear or favour in the conduct of their discussion. That is the British North America Act. Every province agreed to the constitution at the time of confederation. The government has no power to go to London to ask for a change without at least asking the people what they think of it. It should ask the people by way of a plebiscite, the fashion of which was begun last year.

This matter affects not only the dominion. It affects the provinces, and affects every citizen in the country. Therefore each province and each citizen, each man and woman have the right to express their views on the matter. If this motion is passed I hope the government will be fair enough to attach to it.