

Redistribution

contract which cannot be amended without the consent of the parties involved. The leader of the opposition said that the French Canadians intend to respect the rights of others but that they want their rights to be similarly upheld.

Hon. Mr. Godbout stated that the leader of the opposition was justified in asserting the rights of his compatriots in that connection. He added that the provincial government had already drafted a protest which will be forwarded to Ottawa at once.

By now, that protest must be in the hands of the government of this country and that is why I say that this resolution should not have been moved at this time. Reference is often made to national unity; under that pretext of national unity a group of the citizens of this country are sometimes asked not to demand self-evident rights, but in the last analysis we must always ascertain whether the principles of justice and equity are observed in such matters. In conclusion, as I said at the outset, I believe that I have discussed this matter, not in a partisan spirit, but on its merits. As long as the government do not advance better reasons than those stated in their resolution for amending the British North America Act, I believe every man who is fully aware of the importance of his mandate in this house is in duty bound to oppose that resolution.

At six o'clock the house took recess.

After Recess

The house resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. J. SASSEVILLE ROY (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, after it had been announced in the speech from the throne that the government would proceed with the redistribution bill, the introduction of this resolution in the house, and the way in which it is worded, greatly astonishes me. I am also greatly disturbed by this proposed breach in the constitution.

Before I proceed with my remarks on the resolution itself, I should like to join with the hon. member for Charlevoix-Saguenay (Mr. Dorion) in extending congratulations to the Minister of Justice (Mr. St. Laurent) upon the last part of his speech this afternoon. Attractive as it seemed, and in spite of all its effectiveness from an electoral point of view, it remains only a fine speech. I do not think it will do anything to heal the breach which we now see being attempted.

May I recall to my hon. friend that we have had fine speeches in the past. I remember very well the speeches we used to hear in the province of Quebec, the promises and pledges that were given, simply for the purpose of

[Mr. Dorion.]

winning an election, as was admitted by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) in his speech on the plebiscite on January 26, 1942. We know exactly what resulted from those fine speeches and promises. A little later, in 1942, we had a plebiscite asking Baptiste to forgive the Prime Minister and the government or the Liberal party for those fine speeches and promises that had been made in the province of Quebec, but at the same time John was asked to overlook the Prime Minister's promises. Well, Baptiste refused to overlook them and John forgot them, and the Prime Minister took advantage of that situation to forget all the fine speeches and promises which had been made in the province of Quebec in the past. This very recent experience is a good lesson to us all.

That is the value of fine speeches. I will not go over again what has been said about this pretence to the effect that there has been a demographic movement in the population from certain provinces since the census was taken in 1941. I think that has been fully covered by the hon. member for Charlevoix-Saguenay, and what he has said should convince us that the situation will be precisely the same after the war, which I suppose will be in 1944 or 1945.

We shall proceed then on the very same figures and the same census, and I do not see what difference it can make.

There is another paragraph, however, to which I would call Your Honour's attention. It reads:

Whereas experience has shown that such a readjustment may give rise to sharp differences of opinion as to the appropriate delimitation of electoral divisions, which differences it is most desirable to avoid while Canada continues at war. . . .

I suggest that this pretence is even weaker than the one I mentioned before. The government has not shown very great wisdom in this statement; it has not proved that its psychology is sound. I am amazed that the government and so many hon. members should fear some bitter differences of opinion over redistribution. Should we have proceeded with redistribution, such an action would not have imposed injustice on anyone. But the manner in which we are proceeding does imply great injustice to one province, and the government is not at all afraid, it seems, that some discussion will arise over it. That is one thing I cannot understand.

I was amazed to listen to all these gentlemen this afternoon all speaking very well, offering to support this resolution and concurring in the Prime Minister's argument that we should not raise this question on the floor of the house in this time of stress during the war.