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Provincial Parliament.

DEBATE ON CONFEDERATION, IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

[Phonographic Report by H. Oldright.]

TUESDAY, April 10th.

HON. SOLICITOR GENERAL said: The time would now appear to have arrived when the subject of the Confederation of the British North American Provinces should be brought before this House. There was little or no object in pressing it upon the attention of the Legislature of this Province, until there was some prospect that New Brunswick would consent to a Union; for, situated as that Province is, there can be no Confederation without her concurrence; now, however, that there is every probability that a favorable consideration will be given to the question there, the Government, considering as it does that the measure is calculated to advance the best interests of this Province, as well as the general prosperity of the whole of British America, has taken advantage of the first fitting opportunity of obtaining the opinion of the Legislature on it. It may be said, why not wait till the decision of New Brunswick is known? But as this may not take place for some time, our session may be then over, and that would probably render necessary an extra session.

The resolution I intend to lay on the table of the House will test its opinion as to the desirableness of Confederation in itself; and, as objections have been taken to the terms embraced in the scheme prepared by the delegates at Quebec, the resolution proposes that these should be open to modification. This scheme has been thoroughly discussed in all the Provinces, but it has hardly had justice done to it. Its opponents in each Province seem to think it a sufficient objection to its adoption, if any of its terms are not in strict accordance with the interests of their Province in every respect; forgetting that such a union must necessarily be based on a compromise; and now, inasmuch as Canada has expressed its willingness to adopt Confederation on the proposed basis, any modification will of course be in favor of the maritime Provinces, but we cannot reasonably expect to have our way in everything; some points must be conceded by one Province, and some by another, in order to make such a whole as all could adopt, and while such an arrangement was effected as gave general satisfaction to the delegates at Quebec, each one of them probably felt that there were alterations they would like to have seen made in favor of his own Province.

The first question for our consideration is, whether it is desirable to have Confederation at all, and if so, surely it will be practicable for delegates from all the Provinces to arrange terms of union, just and fair to all. Some modification may be needed on a further discussion and investigation of the subject, yet I am bound to say that, taking the Quebec scheme as a whole, the delegates have no reason to be ashamed of their work.

It is not my intention to say much on the general question, upon which indeed nothing new can be said, but as it is often urged that we are so small and Canada is so large, that we shall be swamped in that great country, I confess I take a very different view of the subject,—the maritime Provinces are indeed each of them small in extent, compared with Canada, and that may be a good reason for not remaining disunited, and therefore always small and insignificant, but that Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland will form an insignificant portion of the Confederacy, I cannot admit. Insignificant in point of extent, compared with Canada, they may be, but in no other respect; and extent of country is not the only element of prosperity, as England proves; and we, it will be remembered, possess some of the elements of England's wealth; surrounded by

the sea, we are nourishing seamen in every port and bay along our shores to supply our mercantile marine, we have coal and other minerals in abundance, and fisheries of inestimable value. With these advantages the Maritime Provinces cannot but form a very important portion of British America, and, with the large present and growing population of that extensive country for customers, may we not expect to have manufactories springing up in every direction, and our commerce proportionately increasing.

We are told again our Province is in the enjoyment of prosperity, why is a change necessary? It is quite true that as a small Province our affairs are prosperous, but we are small, not to say insignificant, and disunited from the other Provinces we must continue to be so. Are we content that things should remain as they are, when by uniting with the other Maritime Provinces, and with Canada, we should combine with a large extent of country such sources of wealth as few countries possess, so that, looking forward but a few years, we may anticipate taking such a stand among the nations of the world, as its inhabitants may be proud of? Are we to be content, instead of this, to look forward in all time to come to be nothing more than we are at present, if indeed we can remain as we are. But one word on the subject of defence, what can the small population of a small Province with small revenue do against the attack of a powerful nation? Whereas by Union we have a large country with a large and very rapidly increasing population, hardy and brave, which, by a union of their resources, would very soon be as able, as they are now willing, to defend themselves from every aggression, assisted as we should be by Great Britain.

I ask then are we to have a Union? Is it desirable on any terms? Those who think not will of course vote against the resolution I am about to propose while those who think otherwise will vote for it, even though they should approve of the Quebec Scheme in all its particulars, as it is now proposed to open it to modification.

With these few remarks I beg leave to move the following resolution:—

"Whereas in the opinion of this House, it is desirable that a Confederation of the British North American Provinces should take place:

"Resolved therefore, That His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor be authorized to appoint delegates to arrange a scheme of Union, which will effectually ensure just provision for the rights and interests of this Province, each of the Provinces co-operating to have an equal voice in such delegation,—Upper and Lower Canada being for this purpose viewed as separate Provinces."

Hon. President observed that it had been usual to lay resolutions to be debated, on the table, as notice, for a day or two previous to the debate. At the same time, he was not aware that the course now taken was unparliamentary.

Hon. Mr. Pineo observed that there were two or three members absent.

Hon. Mr. McCully rose to address the House, when—

Hon. Mr. Brown suggested that as some members were absent, he (Mr. McC.) would do greater justice to himself by delaying his observations till they could be present.

Hon. Mr. McCully believed that the practice of laying a resolution on the table by way of notice rested with the mover of the resolution himself. He did not think that there was any rule of the House to compel a member to do so. He quite conceded to the hon. member from Yarmouth that it would not be fair to press a division on the question in the absence of several members. So far as he was individually concerned, he was as well prepared to address the House now as at any other time. As the House had a reporter who was prepared to give not only to absent members, but to all the world the views of members, nobody would be prejudiced.

Hon. Mr. Brown questioned whether the hon. member stated the rule of the House correctly. However, he should make no further objection.

Hon. Mr. McCully then said:—I rise to second the resolution, and in doing so I

shall not occupy much time, for I may feel it necessary to address the House at a future stage of the debate. As one of those gentlemen who assisted in framing what is commonly called the Quebec Scheme, I feel that it may reasonably be expected of me to give a reason for the course which I have followed for the last 18 months. I take it that it would seem strange to the people of Nova Scotia if, when this resolution was laid on the table, I should say nothing. This is not a question that is new to the people of this Province. It has been before them ever since I came into public life. There is not a public man in the Province who has not devoted more or less consideration to some scheme for a union of the Colonies. It is a great many years since the subject was first presented to public attention, but during the last 18 months it has towered far above and beyond all other subjects that have interested the public mind. It therefore cannot be said that there is any individual not prepared to grapple with this question to some extent. The time has now arrived when it must be practically dealt with. It originated in the first instance with but a few individuals, but they were men in advance of the age in which they lived. Years ago there were men in this and in the adjoining colonies, who thought this one of the subjects which deserved grave and careful consideration. In our own Province and within our own recollection, the most eminent men whom this country has produced have said that these Provinces could be united, and united on a platform fair and beneficial to all. It was by the government, of which I had the honor to be a member, that a resolution in favor of a Union of the Colonies was prepared in 1861. In that year the other branch of the Legislature passed, unanimously, a resolution, submitted by the Executive of that day, inviting attention to the devising of some scheme, by which these Provinces could be united for the common benefit. The question has since gathered volume and strength, and has enlisted the sympathies of the most intelligent men of these Provinces. Within the last 18 months it has taken such possession of the public mind, and of the people of the Empire at large, that the question is now pressed on us not so much from within, perhaps, as from without. Therefore, the men who profess allegiance to our Queen are called upon to give the gravest consideration to a measure by which these Colonies may be held by that common tie of fealty which every one of us as British subjects owes to our common sovereign.

As one of those who was honored to take part in the delegation, which worked out what is generally called the Quebec Scheme, it was as unexpected, as probably to any other gentlemen composing that Convention, that Her Majesty's Government should have looked upon it with so much favor. It was certainly unexpected to me that almost before the delegates had reached home, Her Majesty's Government should have called attention to the urgent necessity for immediate action. We have felt and do feel that these opinions, from a quarter where there ought to be no suspicion of improper motives, deserve our deepest and most earnest regard. They have forced their way, step by step, till at last the time has arrived in all the Provinces, when public men must deal with this question,—when they must pronounce yes or nay. It has become an imperative necessity that those who are in favor of Confederation,—in favor of Union,—must show that they are in heart what they profess to be,—desirous of maintaining British connection and British rule. We have been told by the highest authority, and have it from a quarter demanding our best attention, that if not impossible it is exceedingly inconvenient, and perhaps all but impossible for the mother country to protect us, unless we confederate and become united among ourselves. I am not a soldier or a sailor, I profess not to be competent to pass upon militia questions; but I do regard with respect the opinions of those distinguished men whose names are famous, who are competent to pronounce upon such a question. Then let it not be said that

these opinions are mine. Not at all. They are those of persons experienced in such matters,—men who have distinguished themselves in flood and field. It is their opinions that I give as my authority for these statements,—that these Provinces disunited are indefensible. When I find men of this class publishing such opinions in favor of Union, how can I or any one else, set up our *ipse dixit* in opposition. I can only draw the conclusion, then, which every right-minded man will draw, that it would be the rankest presumption to set up our opinions against men of this standing.

This resolution affirms that Confederation is desirable. Now there are persons who say that it is not desirable, they have a right to their opinions and a right to express them, but with whom is the weight of evidence? Which class shall we respect? It requires little sagacity to see why we should be confederated. There is a power on the frontier that is now stirred to its very centre, one that is not imbued with love to Great Britain or any of her colonies. If we are to remain part of the British Empire there should be an early understanding on the subject of common defence. If it be true, that we cannot be as well defended in an isolated as in a united condition, then I say that the platform is laid on which this resolution is based.

I shall not say much as to the mercantile question, though it is one which has called up much controversy. I believe that there are very few men who think that trade is encouraged by hemming it within narrow circles by high tariffs. Trade to flourish requires to be as free as the atmosphere, and to have as few and as low tariffs as possible. It is impossible to sustain Governments without revenues and there is no way of keeping up revenues except by tariffs. Why should we not, then, endeavour to break down these unnecessary walls between the different Provinces, and to have one common tariff for all? That is a principle which I should like to hear fully discussed.

Look at the currency, too, of these Provinces! You cannot travel a day in any direction, in any of them, except Canada, that you are not met by a variety of currency. That is an unnecessary inconvenience. We find the interest of money and other artificial regulations also different in the different Provinces. It may probably be said that all this does not necessitate Confederation. This difficulty has been discussed for the last quarter of a century; but no man or body of men have yet been able to devise a scheme by which a tariff could be made applicable to all these Provinces, while they remain disunited. As men have different interests, so have different Provinces. There are also great indispensable improvements which no one Province can be expected to construct by itself. I allude to means of locomotion by land and by sea, and among these no one has commanded so much attention as the Inter-Colonial Railway. That subject, too, has been before the Province for a great many years, and we have expended upwards of a million of pounds sterling in attempting to start railways, and we have made as yet but little progress, and our railways, whither do they lead? I have felt, and I think we all must feel, that without Union there can be no Inter-colonial Railway, and that, unless we are able to have communication at all seasons of the year between the Maritime Provinces and the great country that lies to the back of us, we never can become a great people. Nature seems to have formed this Province to be the *lap*—yes the *lap* of the great country behind. But we can never expect to be much more than we are now, while we remain in our present isolated condition—walled up by high tariffs from New Brunswick, six months of the year cut off from the sister Provinces—a harbour on the sea with not even a river emptying into it, nor one within our Province worthy of the name. Railways have largely built up the towns on the seaboard of the United States, although some of them lie at the mouths of great rivers. This city is but the work of a hundred years—what may we not reasonably expect.