

Inquiries of the Ministry

Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent (Prime Minister): The government has been discussing the recommendations that were made by that committee, but feels that there should be informal discussions with the various groups in the house before deciding whether or not they should be brought forward during this session. It is a matter which does, of course, affect the way in which government business can be dealt with in the house, but primarily it affects the rights and privileges of members of the house. Therefore the government would not be disposed to recommend these modifications unless, after informal discussions, it appeared to be the desire of a large number of members of the house that an opportunity be afforded to discuss them.

Mr. Donald M. Fleming (Eglinton): May I ask the Prime Minister if any opportunity will be given to try out at this session, on an experimental basis, a change in the hours of sitting of the house by advancing the time of the sitting by, say, an hour?

Mr. St. Laurent: If I remember correctly that was one of the recommendations, and naturally it will be considered when the recommendations are before the house, if it is found desirable to bring them before the house.

BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACTPROCEDURE IN AMENDMENT—REFERENCE TO
RADIO BROADCAST BY PRIME MINISTER

On the orders of the day:

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, there is a matter which I suggest does require that some information be given to the house, in view of other proceedings which will be taking place. In a radio speech last night the Prime Minister said, in part:

You all know that the terms of confederation are set out in the British North America Act. That act is the foundation of the Canadian union. The British North America Act is a most important part of the Canadian constitution. But it is also a statute of the British parliament. Every time we Canadians want any change made in the British North America Act we have to go through the form of getting the change made by the parliament of the United Kingdom. As a Canadian I do not like to have to do that. What is more, I feel sure, the United Kingdom parliament does not like it either. I believe we Canadians should work out a method of making our constitutional changes right here in Canada.

In view of the fact that certain matters are before the house which may well raise a question as to the necessity of amendment of the British North America Act, I believe the house should be informed this afternoon whether it is the intention of the government to take proceedings which would have the result of empowering the parliament of

[Mr. Knowles.]

Canada to change our constitution, and if so, whether that is to be done without consulting the provincial governments.

Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, no one could contemplate anything of that kind without consulting the provincial governments. As the leader of the opposition knows, there was a consultation with the provincial governments ten or twelve years ago, perhaps more than that. The negotiations reached a stage where it was required to have the provincial governments consider the situation as it had developed throughout the conference. While that consideration was being given by some of the provincial governments, there was a provincial election in my province which brought about a change in government, and the matter dropped. The procedure which I believe would be required to deal with a question of the kind would be similar to that which was followed at that time, some twelve or fourteen years ago.

Mr. Drew: May we take it, then, that it is not the intention of the government to deal with this subject during the current session?

Mr. St. Laurent: Oh, no. I do not think it would be possible to complete the preliminary negotiations which would be required to give to this matter the serious consideration it deserves, in time to enable us to have anything for parliament to consider at this session. It is probably one of the most serious steps since confederation for the people of Canada to contemplate. I think it would be desirable, if we can find a method that would satisfy the two requirements I mentioned in my radio broadcast last night, to have the power to deal with constitutional amendments here. But I pointed out that on the one hand we would not want a constitution so rigid that it would be a strait-jacket on the Canadian people and prevent the proper development of our national personality, and on the other hand there would have to be the most positive safeguard for all the historic rights which are to a certain extent safeguarded by the act as it exists at present.

Mr. Coldwell: I was going to ask the same question.

BERLINPARTICIPATION BY CANADA IN MAINTENANCE OF
AIR OPERATIONS

On the orders of the day:

Mr. T. L. Church (Broadview): I am not taking any part in the debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne, but I want to direct a question to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. I understood him to say that Canada has taken no part in the maintenance of air supremacy at Berlin