

• (1220)

Now we come to the question of what we can do and what we must do. I am going to assume that the government has some legislation. Maybe that is a wrong assumption, but I note that on Friday last in response to a question the Prime Minister said:

It will be our intention to indicate, through the House leader, as many bills as are necessary in the coming week—

That is this week.

—to permit the House to see the business ahead of it.

That is an implicit statement that the government has legislation ready. Despite the past conduct of the government I will resolve my doubts at this time and hope that the Prime Minister really meant what he said, that he has legislation ready that the House can deal with, and that the government House leader will list the legislation for us.

Presumably the bills that are ready will be introduced for first reading. Why can we not have one of those bills before us today? Why can we not have the bill dealing with old age pension problems before us today? Why is that bill not before the House at this time?

We are prepared to give up our opportunities to challenge the government on several occasions in this debate. We are prepared to waive those opportunities, to postpone them, so that we can get on with the urgent business of the country. I think that the attitude of the Prime Minister and of the government in response to this reasonable request is shameful.

Apart from the very precise reason I have already given, another reason we are so anxious to get started is the past legislative record of the government. There is not enough time available to me to deal with that, but it is an appalling indictment of the government that it has the worst legislative record of any government in at least the last 50 or 60 years. Even if I went back 100 years I would probably find the same to be true, but I was charitable to hon. gentlemen opposite and only went back 60 years.

I point out that in 1968, 1969 and 1970 only about one-third of the legislative proposals which were put forward were passed. In the first of those years 17 of the bills proposed in the legislative list attached to the Speech from the Throne never saw the light of day. Either those bills were not in legislative form or they ran into the rigidity of the cumbersome cabinet structure the Prime Minister has introduced which constitutes such a barrier to the legislative process. I suggest that an examination of the succeeding year shows almost the same record, and in the last session of the preceding parliament less than a third of the bills listed, I think about 12 or 13, were passed. I do not have the precise records with me now.

My hon. friends in the New Democratic Party are aware of this situation. My hon. friends in the Social Credit party are aware of it. Are they prepared to sit quietly by and accept the continuation in office of the government on the basis of its legislative record, and give to the government a vote of confidence before they have seen the colour of the government's money and the kind of legislation it intends to introduce? If they are, then they are showing a great deal more naiveté and innocence than I ever thought

*The Address—Mr. Baldwin*

they possessed, and my past experience with hon. gentlemen in those parties makes me believe they are neither innocent nor naïve. They may be other things but those things they are not.

Could it be a fact that the government has not got the legislation ready? Is that possible? We need to find out. I may move a motion before I conclude which I hope will give us an opportunity to find out. Indeed, based on the past record of the government it is likely that the legislation may not be ready, but I will give members of the government credit and will believe that some bills are ready, including the old age pension legislation, simply on the basis of what the Prime Minister said.

Under those conditions was the Leader of the Opposition not justified in making his request for a postponement of this debate? We must bear in mind the stumbling, bumbling record of the government in the legislative sense. Here I am reminded of the story so well told by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker). I cannot tell it quite as well as he; in fact I do not think anyone can. No doubt he will have a lot to say later in this debate, but if one regards the government's legislative record as a 500-acre pasture, then if one cow passed through that pasture leaving a memorial behind it, in the legislative sense the Prime Minister and the government would be sure to land on that face down. That is the way I apprehend their legislative approach, their bumbling, stumbling ineptness, incapacity and incompetence. It is just tragic, Mr. Speaker.

With a minority House it may well be that we could improve on the legislative programs of this inept and incompetent government. Today we find that the government has not got all the answers. I do not pretend that our party has all the answers, but I believe that the answers are to be found in the totality of all the people of this country and that this House of 264 members is the institution most fitted and best equipped to ascertain the needs of the people of Canada and to respond to those needs in terms of legislation.

We, Mr. Speaker, are not able to initiate legislation. Nor can the House do it. Under our system of government it is the responsibility of the government. It is the government's responsibility to secure the essential financial recommendations from His Excellency and then introduce bills in the House and let the House deal with them.

In the previous majority House we found a great degree of incompetence in providing the type of legislation that was so essential for the good of the country. If any other proof is required, surely what we found out today with regard to the unemployment statistics is the best answer to this question.

If the government would introduce its legislation there would be an opportunity for the House to deal with it and make the legislation responsive to the true needs of the people of Canada. That is what we are asking the government to do. This is a minority House of Commons. The government ought to be prepared to introduce its legislation at once so that we can look at it, so that we can start dealing with it and so that we can start to improve it. This is imperative at this stage.