

The Address—Mr. Pearson

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I should like the Prime Minister to exercise that patience which he normally shows in this House of Commons.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the hon. gentleman a question?

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman objects to what was done. Does the hon. gentleman remember that Mr. King did the same thing?

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I am raising this matter because it is all part of the pattern of what I call the electoral war of nerves. So far, and this is perhaps what is worrying the Prime Minister, the government's assaults in this war of nerves have all been very easily repulsed and the only casualties so far have been the good name and the reputation of the government itself. The electoral battle, it will be recalled, was to have been joined last autumn over the issue of free enterprise versus socialism—an issue which, coming from this particular government, provoked only a yawn in the country. Then there was the sordid mess, provoked by the government, of the Coyne affair and the action of the other house in protecting successfully the right of an accused to be heard before the body which was being asked to condemn him by a bill of attainder.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): With the assistance of a Liberal advertising agency. Who paid them?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think this time is as appropriate as any—in fact, it is more than appropriate—to remind the house that the member who has the floor is entitled to an uninterrupted hearing.

Mr. Pearson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but these interruptions do not really disturb me very much. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Fleming) seems also to be pulsating with excitement this afternoon.

We recall we were to have had an election on the Coyne and Senate issue, too, but the government soon backed away from that one in the face of an aroused and hostile public opinion.

Some hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Pearson: Then there was to have been a quick dissolution of this house and a quick election on the massive program which was to have appeared in the speech from the throne. Well, we do not hear so much about that now. The evidence of declining popularity and especially the evidence of the five Ontario by-elections, two of which, in Toronto, were described by the Minister of Finance before

they were held as a "miniature general election whose influence would be paramount" was enough to—

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): No, no.

Mr. Pearson: Oh, I have got the statement here.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): I said they had been described as that.

Mr. Pearson: Anyway, this evidence of declining popularity has perhaps removed the impulse to have an election on a quick dissolution. So goes the war of nerves, leaving people more bored than shell shocked. When the election comes it will be on the record of this government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: I am delighted to have said something which has won the unanimous approval of this house save for those hon. members in the corner to my right in the N.D.P.-C.C.F. group who did not express their views with regard to the statement I have just made.

I do not this afternoon intend to join in the speculation about the date of the election because that would involve trying to read the mind of the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker). That, of course, as I imagine even his colleagues have found out by now, is a fruitless occupation. The most discouraging prediction I have discovered about the election date comes from the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Walker). I am sorry he has to leave the house.

Mr. Walker: Right here.

Mr. Pearson: It was difficult to pick the hon. gentleman out among his more conspicuous colleagues.

Mr. Walker: Thank you.

Mr. Pearson: The most discouraging prediction came, as I said, from the Minister of Public Works. His prediction would put the election off until parliament was automatically dissolved in 1963 under the provisions of our constitution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: I hear some applause for that, too, from nervous members from some parts of the country.

An hon. Member: All Liberals.

Mr. Pearson: The minister said in Nova Scotia last December that the delay in calling an election was due to the government's desire to fulfil all its promises before appealing to the people. That is a prediction which would mean an indefinite delay in setting an election date.