

*The Address—Mr. Drew*

In the face of the situation affecting not only the prairie farmer but the economy of the whole country, surely we should have the opportunity to discuss this in parliament without delay and to have the position of the government clearly stated in definite and understandable terms. I therefore repeat my request that when the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) speaks today he indicate that he will set aside a day for this purpose, and that as a preliminary to the discussion which will then take place we shall have a definite statement from the government as to what it intends to do in regard to this very critical situation.

In the hope that the Prime Minister will concur in this suggestion, which I believe is a reasonable way of dealing with a subject which should be dealt with as soon as possible, and that we may have full opportunity for discussion of this subject, I will not extend my remarks on this matter further at this time, nor do I intend to offer an amendment dealing with this very serious situation, because that might be used as a reason for withholding the statement which I think we should have from the government as to what their intention is.

Another subject has attracted a great deal of attention in the past few weeks. I refer to the decision of the government to transfer the national film board from Ottawa. It is not my intention now to discuss the merits of that decision so much as to point out the way that important matters of this kind are disposed of without consulting parliament.

When this decision was challenged by the mayor and council of the city of Ottawa, it was reported that it was stated by the Prime Minister that parliament reached this decision. May I remind hon. members of the way in which this decision was reached. This decision was first announced outside of the House of Commons some time ago. It was stated that this was going to be done, and then a figure was included in the estimates, which came up for consideration. This very item which it is said indicated the decision of parliament was called after midnight the day before the last session of the last parliament came to an end.

I concede that to the extent that the passing of this item may be taken as acceptance of this decision already made by the government, or its agencies, then those who permitted it to pass must all accept their share of responsibility. I do not pretend that it is otherwise. But it will also be recalled that over and over again we have insisted upon the setting up of a committee on estimates for this very reason. We have pointed

out that if an informed parliament is to make decisions upon the basis of information, then some mechanism should be devised by which information could be obtained in advance in regard to some of these items which have a habit of coming forward at very inconvenient times, and creating great difficulties for discussion, often not because of the neglect of hon. members, but because hon. members are engaged on important committee work in other parts of the building at the very time that those estimates come forward.

In defence of many hon. members who are interested in these subjects, let it be recalled that at certain points in the last session, as in other sessions, many committees were meeting simultaneously, thereby withdrawing members from the house, so that when items came up for consideration the hon. members who had prepared themselves to deal with that particular subject were elsewhere in the building doing the proper business of parliament.

It will be recalled also that we have been ready to accept any method for improvement that is put forward. We do not suggest any limited method. If there is some better method that the government may have, I am sure we would welcome it. But let us recall now, in the face of this suggestion that parliament decided on the removal of the film board from Ottawa to Montreal, that over and over again important estimates are left until the last minute, not always by accident, and until the pressure of events has made it difficult, if not impossible, to deal with them in an orderly fashion. I recognize that the members of the opposition, as well as the members of the government, must accept their share of responsibility for any loose practices of this kind, or the result of those practices; but at least we can say that we have urged, and do now urge, the adoption of a system of prior examination of these items which would ensure that in a case of this kind the information would be obtained which would give parliament some opportunity to challenge the decision of the government, with knowledge of the essential facts.

In this case parliament simply has not made the decision on the basis of any exchange of opinions in regard to the subject. It has not been told why a site has been chosen which is certainly one of the noisiest in Canada, because of jet aircraft taking off from an airdrome nearby. The importance of this fact I have mentioned lies in the necessity of putting special soundproof devices over the buildings which would be wholly unnecessary, we are told, if another site were chosen, even if it is right to move