

The Address—Mr. St. Laurent

I am wondering whether that means that our failure consists in not doing it without an agreement with the provinces. We do not think it can be done. We do not think there can be contributions required for the specific purpose of old age pensions, or any other security benefits, without an agreement with the provinces. I find it rather strange that the hon. gentleman who is so insistent about provincial autonomy should be charging us with failure to do something which cannot be done without that agreement.

Mr. Drew: Which you never sought.

Mr. St. Laurent: I did not catch what the hon. member said.

Mr. Drew: And which you never sought.

Mr. St. Laurent: Which we never sought?

Mr. Drew: Never.

Mr. St. Laurent: The hon. gentleman has a memory that does not go back as far as 1945 because I was there in 1945, and the hon. gentleman was also there in another capacity than that of leader of the opposition in this house. Well, we both know whether or not an agreement was sought, and we both know why no agreement was reached. We are going to have another conference in the autumn of 1950 and the hon. gentleman will not be there as a provincial representative, so we may get an agreement. From the difference in the tone of the deliberations at the dominion-provincial conference in January of this year and that of 1945 and 1946, I have reason to expect that something may be accomplished.

This same article which bears the title "Unemployment insurance doesn't make jobs" goes on to point to another straw man which is raised by some distortion of the facts from which the inferences are drawn. The article says:

The government's position with respect to trade is a poor one, no matter how examined. If it believed what it was telling the country six months ago, which was that trade was at "unprecedented peaks" and would likely stay there, then it must be convicted of not knowing its business. If it didn't believe what it was telling the country six months ago, and knew that trade was in a bad way and might get worse, it must be convicted of deliberate deception.

Part of that is true, but part is not true. We did say six months ago that trade was at unprecedented peaks, and that was true. But we did not say it was likely to stay there. We did say there were serious difficulties; that we would do our best to overcome those difficulties; and if they were difficulties that could be overcome there was no man better qualified to do what might be required than the then and present Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe). Let us see what I

said in Port Arthur, the home town of the minister, on April 22, 1949; I have the text here:

The whole future of Canadian trade—and Canadian prosperity—depended on new resourcefulness and new energy and bold initiative on the part of government. Almost overnight the Department of Trade and Commerce became one of the most important in the government—and it was then that Mr. King turned once more to Mr. Howe.

Now, I am not going to claim that Mr. Howe has solved all our trade problems, because, if I did, he would get up at once and tell me I was mistaken.

Some hon. Members: He sure would.

Mr. St. Laurent: Oh, yes; hon. gentlemen may laugh about that; but the minister does talk even to his best friends, whether or not he agrees with them, in such a way that we always know where he stands and what is his position. I said and I believed that if I were to make that statement he would get up at once and tell me I was mistaken. Then I added:

He knows the problems are still thorny and there is no easy solution—but I will venture the prediction that if Mr. Howe and those who are working with him don't find a solution, there won't be one to find.

I made a similar statement on May 18 at Amherst, when I said:

Now it is quite true that the maintenance of markets for our surplus production is a problem. It is a problem not because of any condition in Canada but because of the dislocation of trade and the destruction of productive capacity in our former markets overseas. The restoration of the British market and western European markets has been a problem, a continuing problem, ever since the end of the war. And it is going to continue to be a problem for a good many years yet. But the fact is that up to the present, Canadian exporters, with pretty active co-operation from the government, have been able to find markets for nearly all they produce which cannot be sold profitably in Canada.

I made similar statements on May 19 in a broadcast from Moncton; on June 1 at Owen Sound; on June 4 at Hamilton; on June 15 at Pembroke; on June 21 at Toronto; and on June 24 at St. John's, Newfoundland. In those statements I said it was a serious problem but I did not believe—and I do not believe—any man in Canada is better qualified to handle it than the Minister of Trade and Commerce.

Now I should say a word about old age pensions. We are asking the house to set up a committee to look at all aspects of the problem, because there are aspects as to which it will be very valuable for all hon. members to have as much information and as much of the factual background as possible. I have gone into the matter to a certain extent, though not the extent to which it will be gone into by the committee. I have obtained some preliminary figures. As of September 30, 1949, some 265,000 old age pensioners were qualified under the means test. At that time