

*The Address—Mr. Lesage*

Quebec, but from the constituents of nearly every electoral district throughout Canada. It is therefore with an unequivocal mandate that he now comes before parliament to ask both houses for their approval of the program which has already been sanctioned by the people who sent us here when they voted for us last June.

Some people would like to see these measures postponed. No good ever comes of delaying too long, Mr. Speaker. In the past, important problems were submitted to a dominion-provincial conference. Without censuring anyone, I point out that unfortunately certain interests availed themselves of that occasion to boost their political capital and gain the confidence of the electors. Why did that happen? Because the subject under consideration at those conferences was so broad that the delegates could go off at a tangent. On the other hand, we have held many dominion-provincial conferences quietly, smoothly and without fanfare, at which federal and provincial authorities were in agreement. For that reason, I feel that in recommending that the debate on amendments to the constitution be restricted to problems involving joint jurisdiction or relating to minorities, the Prime Minister has made an excellent proposal.

I fail to see why we should require the assent of the provinces when dealing with matters that concern only the dominion any more than they would need the concurrence of the federal parliament in spheres entirely under their control.

If a federal-provincial conference is being planned to deal with so broad a matter, I feel sure that, after our experience of the past, it will lead to no practical results. Inevitably, passions will be aroused, the issue will be dodged and this, finally, can only lead to the failure of such a conference, whereas by concentrating on a given question, the Prime Minister has already laid the groundwork of an almost certain success. After all, a spirit of co-operation, of tolerance and of justice, is all that can be required of those attending such a conference.

I would not want anyone and especially those who represent the minority, of which I am a part, to concede a single one of the rights guaranteed by the letter of confederation and which are today, I insist, threatened because of a constitutional practice which has forced itself upon us since 1837. Not for any consideration would I want one single shred of minority or provincial rights to be transferred to this parliament. I am confident that the autonomy of the provinces will be

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safeguarded, but I also hope that, in order to ensure Canada's continued growth, those fields which were given to the federal government by the fathers of confederation will also be protected. After all, if the provinces are entitled to their autonomy, we are also entitled to ours. The parliament of Canada must be free to act in those fields which are its sole responsibility and on no account should those who represent the central authorities be willing to abandon even one single shred of its rights. But each delegate, while prepared to defend the rights of those whom he represents, should come to this conference in a spirit of tolerance, co-operation and Canadian patriotism. Thus, we may be sure that this conference will meet with success.

If agreement is reached on the manner in which our constitution can be amended in all fields, only one additional step will be required to make it truly Canadian, one to be written in the statutes of this parliament and in those of the various provinces of Canada. Then we shall have achieved complete sovereignty, a dream that has been with us for so long.

(Text):

**Mr. T. G. W. Ashbourne (Grand Falls-White Bay):** Mr. Speaker, I should like my first remarks in this house to be words of thanks to the electors of the riding of Grand Falls-White Bay in Newfoundland, which riding consists of the electoral districts of Grand Falls, Green Bay, White Bay and Labrador, the last named including an area of some 113,000 square miles. I want to thank the electors for the confidence they have expressed in sending me to this historic House of Commons, and I am very happy to be here.

To you, sir, I should like to add my congratulations to those already expressed by other hon. members on your election as Speaker of this house. There is an air of permanence about this august chamber. I trust that you will long be spared to fulfil the duties of your exalted position which, I hope, will prove a delight to you and of benefit to us. I am delighted to congratulate our Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent), the leader of the great Liberal party, on the success of our party in the election of June 27. His outstanding qualities of leadership played an important role in the magnitude of this great victory.

I should like to offer my congratulations also to the hon. member for Nicolet-Yamaska (Mr. Boisvert) and the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Laing) on the excellent