

*The Address—Mr. Drew*

question as to whether this country is to continue as a federal state, or whether it is to become a unitary state with one central government. I hope no one in this House of Commons will brush aside a statement of that kind because in this case I am simply quoting a statement made by a man who served in this government on an earlier occasion and who I know commands the respect and admiration of many members of this government. That warning that I have just given, namely, that we must decide whether we are going to continue as a federal state or as a unitary state, was placed before a gathering of lawyers at Dalhousie university law school a month ago by the Hon. Angus L. Macdonald, premier of Nova Scotia. I mention his words particularly, because they came from the head of a provincial government who once served as a member of the present dominion government. In a careful legal analysis of the trends towards centralization, he made it clear that the issue now before us is not the adequacy of any contributions by the dominion government in lieu of taxes, but that the real and the inescapable issue is whether, in fact, our federal system is to survive. He pointed out that this is a subject which was under consideration at an earlier date. There were those who thought that Canada should become a unitary state in 1867. The decision reached at that time was that Canadian unity demanded a federal system with its division of authority and the existence of local governments which would have jurisdiction over those matters of traditional local concern which meant so much to the people of the different provinces who were then seeking to find common ground for national unity.

There is no reason why anyone who believes in a unitary state should not argue in support of that contention today, if that is the belief of any Canadian. There are those of us who believe that neither our historic background nor the area of this country makes a unitary state suitable for Canada. On the other hand, those who believe in that system have every right to assert it. They should assert it openly, however, and not seek to change our federal system by stealth. Let no one be uncertain about the fact that this question is now squarely before us. I again repeat the words of Mr. Macdonald, not only because he has served both with this government and with a provincial government, but also because it cannot be charged that his views are based on political opposition to this government. He has stated the case in these simple words:

A fundamental question now arises—it is this: do we wish to continue as a federal state?

[Mr. Drew.]

This warning comes from a man who knows the minds of many of the members of this government from long daily contact with them. It is with that knowledge and with that experience that he poses a question that he says must now be answered by all Canadians, unless continuing centralization is to produce a unitary state in Canada, no matter what it may be called.

There has been some tendency on the part of members of this government to leave the impression that the signing of temporary agreements with provincial governments, under which their most important tax fields are given up in return for annual payments, in some way disposes of this question. It does nothing of the kind.

When the Ontario government recently signed an agreement, which it was emphasized was a temporary agreement, the premier of that province made it clear that this did nothing to solve the fundamental question which has now been under discussion for ten years. He made it clear that the agreement was merely a stopgap and that it is the duty of the dominion government to take the steps that are necessary to re-allocate sources of revenue so that the provincial governments and the municipalities will be able to meet their increasing obligations from financial resources under their own control. The government of Nova Scotia has also signed an agreement. The premier of that province, however, leaves no doubt that in his opinion that does not dispose of the basic issue which must be dealt with right away. Other provincial premiers have taken the same position, although their governments have also signed temporary agreements.

As we consider this subject, which is of such vital importance to the future of Canada, it is therefore necessary for us to bear in mind that when the government of Quebec is so insistent in its demand that the federal system be respected, the government of Quebec is not alone in that demand, nor is it alone in the opinion that our federal system is in jeopardy, unless we reverse the present trend toward centralization.

There is no reference in the speech from the throne to any suggested meeting between the dominion and the provincial governments to discuss this subject. I am directing my arguments, therefore, to the proposition that it is essential for the dominion government to take immediate steps to review this situation, if it does in fact believe in the federal system and is not deliberately seeking to replace that system by a unitary state, in fact if not in name.