

The Address—Mr. Drew

a royal commission for the purpose of inquiring into the whole broad field of dominion-provincial relations, to make recommendations as to the way in which our federal structure could be best improved and the way the combined resources of Canada could be best put to the use of all our people, so that every part of Canada might benefit from the combined wealth and prosperity of the whole country. I have seen statements reported in the press coming from supposedly responsible people to the effect that it was very unfortunate that the premiers of Ontario and Quebec had prevented agreement at the dominion-provincial conference. Merely as an example of the many statements of that kind coming from presumably responsible sources I would quote these words:

It is calamitous for Canada that the Ontario and Quebec governments could not have continued with those of the other seven provinces in the negotiation of a compromise of the small area of disagreement which still remains between the seven provinces and the dominion.

Similar statements have been made in different parts of Canada; that the premier of Quebec and I, while premier of Ontario, had prevented agreement. Let me say without reservation that any such statement is utterly false and wholly unrelated to the truth.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Drew: I am making these remarks, of course, for those who are capable of understanding them. As far as my position as premier of Ontario at that time was concerned, I was quite able to deal with that subject within the legislature where my responsibilities then lay; but I do feel that in the interests of an understanding of this vitally important subject it is just as well that the record be put straight and that some of this false and vicious propaganda, designed to create prejudice and misunderstanding as between different parts of Canada, be corrected right now on my entry into this house.

The constitution is not something to be treated as merely a scrap of paper. We have seen very convincing evidence of the importance of a working and workable constitution in a great many countries throughout the world in the past few years. It is significant that when France, one of the homes of real democracy, was freed after the invasion of Normandy and the German armies were driven out, the first thing that was done, even before any attempt was made to set up a government, was to draft a constitution which would be acceptable to the people and would, in their belief, continue the freedom which had been restored to them. Hon. members will recall that the first step was

the calling of a constituent assembly, whose purpose was the drafting of a constitution, which was then submitted to the people for approval or otherwise. And as will be also recalled, the first draft was refused, while the second was accepted.

I merely mention this to indicate that we have ample evidence before us that the constitution of any country is a vital feature of good government and of the preservation of the democratic structure at a time when democracy and freedom are the most precious things in the temporal sphere of man's activities.

For many long years it has been apparent that substantial changes were necessary to bring to its full efficiency and vigour the combined system of national government we describe as confederation. To a slight extent the first world war, but to a far greater extent the economic difficulties that followed, and then the second world war, emphasized the need for adjustments and for closer and more effective co-operation. It was out of that understanding of the need for an examination of our constitution that the royal commission was appointed in 1937 and that the subsequent discussions took place. Not for the purpose of emphasizing my participation in any of these events, but simply because it happens that I did have a fairly active part in them, I believe it is important to put on record some of the details of the earlier stages prior to the dominion-provincial conference which met in August of 1945.

Upon the presentation of the report of the Rowell-Sirois commission, a dominion-provincial conference was called but it did not produce very decisive, practical results. That was prior to the time I was premier of Ontario. Time passed and I was called upon to assume office in August, 1943. At that time I emphasized the need for a continuance of these discussions.

In November and December of 1943, I had occasion to go to England. On my return I found reported in the press a number of statements by members of the dominion cabinet indicating the intention of the dominion government to introduce legislation dealing with matters which were obviously within the provincial field. At that time I was concerned about the fact that if this were done it might cause unnecessary confusion and might prevent the possibility of a harmonious working out of some of these practical problems.

For that reason, immediately on my return I wrote to the Prime Minister of Canada and I think this letter, in itself, is a fairly effective answer to those uninformed propagandists who attempt to create the impression that I was a reluctant attendant at the meet-

[Mr. Drew.]