

The Address—Mr. Diefenbaker

the occasion of a similar vote, the amendment of the hon. member for Acadia would be passed almost overwhelmingly.

We can only make the appeal. We can do no more. We can point out the circumstances, just as the hon. member for Royal (Mr. Brooks), the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Green) and other hon. members who have spoken in this house have done. We can only bring the situation to the attention of the government. This situation is intensified by the facts cited a few moments ago by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Noseworthy), because many of those who are unemployed will be veterans, who today deserve more than they are receiving. I think of the men who are denied the war veterans allowance by reason of the fact they are not 60 years of age or are handicapped in maintaining themselves, because they did not serve in a theatre of war or by reason of other circumstances beyond their control. Something should be done to assist these men. The answer given by the government simply is that nothing will be done at this session. Mr. Speaker, the government did not intend to do anything at this session in connection with war pensions or it would have set forth the plan in the speech from the throne, but an aroused public opinion in this country forced the government to act; and may I say that it was aroused as a result of what the opposition members did in this house.

Mr. Martin: Oh, no.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, if silence will arouse the government, then certainly it can be said that the government members were able to arouse the government by their silence in this house.

Mr. Martin: The hon. member is a good debater, but that is about the extent of it.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I did not hear what the minister said.

Mr. Martin: I said that my hon. friend was a good debater, but that was almost the limit.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I appreciate the compliment; nonetheless I give the minister, now that he is in a rising mood, the opportunity to say whether or not he, speaking for the government, will give the supporters of the government the opportunity to vote on this question without regard to any party consideration whatsoever. Will he say that a free vote will be allowed? The answer is silence.

Mr. Martin: Does my hon. friend suggest that when any member of this house comes to
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register his vote, he does not use that privilege in accordance with his best judgment in the circumstances?

Mr. Rowe: That is not the question.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to become involved in any argument such as that. I am asking the question of the minister again, and giving him the opportunity to answer. Will he, speaking for the government, say that a free vote will be given on this amendment? That is the question.

Mr. Martin: What is the answer to my question?

Mr. Diefenbaker: I asked a question for the purpose of having this serious matter decided, and the minister was quick to ask another question. Let me answer him on that matter. When the vote takes place on this question will it be coincidence that, without regard to any consideration whatsoever, those supporting the government will almost unanimously vote with the government in turning down this subamendment? I do not like to make predictions, but I think that is one I can make without fear that events will turn out to be other than as I have prophesied. If, on this question, hon. members were given an opportunity to vote freely and uncontrolled, with a realization of what this means to the tens of thousands of veterans across this country, I feel that that vote would be a demand, a request—yes, an appeal—to the government to provide for an extension of the war veterans allowance which today is at so low a rate as to deny the decencies of life to many of those who, by reason of increasing costs, are unable to carry on. I make this appeal once more. On the other hand, if the minister cannot give that undertaking, would he be willing if the subamendment were withdrawn to give the assurance of the government that at this session this matter would be dealt with? That would be a short cut. In other words this war veterans allowance would take its place alongside the war veterans pension legislation and would provide a degree of security which the new pension legislation will indeed provide.

Having said that, I now pass on to a matter that is of immediate consequence in the province of Saskatchewan and generally in the prairie provinces. The matter has been raised previously, but it deserves to be raised again. The situation in which we find ourselves in Saskatchewan particularly—and the situation prevails to a lesser degree in Alberta and Manitoba—is that more than 100 million bushels of wheat are unharvested and lie under the snow, while tens of millions of