

Prime Minister himself contributed in no small measure to the growth of that custom and practice. In calling that to his attention may I assure him at once that it never was my view.

However, I wish also to say this—and with it I shall have finished with these perhaps facetious observations. We have had such a rush of progressive legislation since December 11 last that many persons across Canada are calling for an annual convention of the Progressive Conservative party. They feel that that is the way to cause progressive legislation to be brought forward by the present government. The Prime Minister may perhaps say that we have been having almost annual conventions. Let me say, Mr. Speaker, that if I thought another convention would help to prod the government into greater action, such as was so greatly needed, we would always be glad indeed to assist and cooperate in any way we could.

Seriously, sir, I do deeply appreciate and have been greatly moved by the kind words of the Prime Minister. Sitting in this House for seven years I think I have learned to sift the wheat from the chaff, and I believe there was a good deal of the wheat of sincerity in what the Prime Minister said this afternoon with respect to myself. I want him to know how very deeply I appreciate it, and what a great comfort and help his words are to me as I assume this exacting office.

To the leaders of the other groups I wish to say a similar word of appreciation. One of the things that I think a man treasures and prizes most highly in public life is the friendship he succeeds in building up not only among those of his own party but among hon. members all over the chamber. One of the things I value most highly is that I believe I have as many friends throughout this chamber as perhaps any other hon. member in the house—at least I like to think I have. For this reason I particularly like the tone of the utterances of those who spoke this afternoon. I did note in the remarks of one of the speakers an expression of the hope that I should have a long tenure of office as leader of the opposition. Perhaps it was a veiled but pointed hint that someone in any event was hoping Mr. Bracken would not find a seat in this house too soon. I always remember a close personal friend who sat where the Minister of Mines and Resources (Mr. Crerar) now sits, the late Right Hon. Ernest Lapointe. For him I had an exceedingly high regard. When I was appointed national chairman of the then Conservative party, he came over to my seat and, calling me by my first name, as he did on all occasions outside of the house,

said: "I have been thinking what I should say to you. It has taken me some time to make up my mind. But, Gordon, I have this to say to you now: in your new job as national chairman I wish you success, but not too much!" I think perhaps that sums up pretty well what many hon. members in the house might like to say to me.

While in times of peace one might regard elevation to the high office of leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition as a great personal honour, and even to-day one cannot overlook that aspect of it, I regard my appointment at this time not as a personal honour but rather as a widened and extended opportunity for service at a critical time in Canada's history. It seems to me that transcends all matters of personal honour. May I go further and say that when one talks of service, and the opportunities for service, I think one is saddened and sobered by the realization of how little we actually do in this chamber as compared with the members of our armed forces who, in zones much more dangerous than this, are rendering service of a kind that we cannot approach here. Therefore this afternoon, when I think of the honours that may come to any civilian and the opportunities for service which may present themselves to any of us from time to time, my thoughts go back to those other services being rendered.

This afternoon I feel very humble as I undertake this responsibility. You, Mr. Speaker, will understand the reasons underlying that humility, because this position carries with it no small responsibility. Particularly is that so for one who has been in the House of Commons for only seven years and who has never occupied a position in the cabinet or government of this country. I am, however, at least fortified by my resolve to give to the extent of my capacity, my ability and my energy, limited though they may be, in the interests of our dominion and of the war effort generally. May I add that I hope I may have the health and strength to lead this party, temporary though that leadership may be, in such a way that we as a party may be able, without taking anything away from any other classes in this country, to do something worth while for the armed forces, for labour and for agriculture. For them, I hope I may be a spokesman.

With those objectives clearly in mind, I am now dedicating this Progressive Conservative party to these and such other aims as we may feel would make for a greater contribution by this country in perhaps the greatest time of stress through which this nation has had to pass.