

Alleged Lack of Government Leadership

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, we of the Social Credit party have taken the position since the June 18 election that parliament must serve the best interests of Canada and the Canadian people. We announced at the beginning of this session that it was the duty of all members of this parliament from all parties to proceed with this responsibility. This is the reason we were elected to this house. I reject the proposition that the only and prime duty of opposition parties in this house is simply to overthrow the government. To assume this attitude is nothing more or less than irresponsibility.

I am convinced that it is the responsibility of all of us in this house, collectively, and this applies in a particular way in this house of minorities, to give to the government the authority and the money to carry on the necessary administration of the nation's public affairs. We gave it to the government in this parliament, even though they are a minority and this is simply because they are the largest minority. It must, however, be recognized that this policy is, has and was based on the premise that the government would provide clearcut policies and appropriate follow-up of legislation which had been previously passed or would be passed by this parliament. The result has been, in the intervening months, that this parliament, this twenty fifth parliament, has failed in its responsibilities to the people of Canada. You will note that I said "this parliament" because it applies collectively to all of us.

At this point, we are particularly concerned by the events of the past few days, and with the reasons these events have come to pass in the way that they have. The statement of the United States state department, and now the resignation of the minister of national defence are two striking examples, and they result not from the determination of the opposition to overthrow the government but from the confusion, indecision and postponement of policy on the part of the government. They must face up to this responsibility to the Canadian people and to us in this house.

While I am not too experienced in the operations of government, one thing that has been impressed upon me has been the fact that there has been nothing but confusion in the arrangements and in the procedures for carrying out the policies which this government has, if any, and also the indecision and postponement of legislative action.

An election in Canada precipitated at this time by the events of the last three days and carrying an anti-American overtone would be a tragedy to Canada. The United States is our closest neighbour, yes and our closest friend. Only damage could result from an election campaign on this basis. I think that

[Mr. Pearson.]

the issue of today's *Toronto Globe and Mail* expresses this situation extremely well in its front page editorial. I quote:

Events in Ottawa make it apparent that Prime Minister John Diefenbaker is giving serious consideration to dissolving parliament and going to the country in a new election. In the opinion of this newspaper an election at this time would be a disaster. This parliament would leave behind it such a record as would disgrace Canada in the history of parliaments, a record blank of any achievement:

You can read this, and you can hear the same sentiments expressed in every corner of the country. We see that this is not just the idea of a few men and women who sit on the opposition side of this house. I continue:

An entire year for which none of the estimates covering the nation's business has been approved. Two sessions without a budget.

Worst of all, no program arising out of that budget to stimulate and stabilize the nation's economic growth, to give us the productivity and competitiveness we must have to survive in changing world markets.

Canada could only suffer serious damage from an immediate election. We have other urgent needs that must take precedence.

The first of these is a clear, comprehensible statement by the government on defence policy, including nuclear arms.

It seems to me that a depressing cloud hangs over this chamber this afternoon as a result of the resignation of the Minister of National Defence. I speak in regard to this with a certain amount of feeling because this hon. member who represents the constituency of Calgary North is practically a hometown boy in my community. In earlier days his farm was only an hour's walk from my family's homestead, and I know he is held in much respect on the basis of the conviction with which he has carried out his responsibilities, except perhaps for his rather infamous talk last Thursday night. Actually I did not expect him so quickly to take the advice I gave him last Thursday evening, but he has found it necessary to resign. Such a decision is not an easy one to take. Certainly it must have been made only in the face of very deep differences of opinion.

As has been stated already this afternoon, our nation needs and expects from us who are members of the house a greater degree of unity and a greater spirit of unitedness in our diversities. I doubt that neither a royal commission nor a federal provincial conference would be much good in trying to work out the problem we have here. It might help if we had a parliamentary committee to study this thing, and it may be that the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Harkness) would make a good chairman for it. The thing I am concerned with is simply that we are not facing, in an intelligent and responsible way, the responsibilities we have to the people who elected us here.