

further meetings with the provincial governments of this country to work out a system of co-operation between those governments and, above all, to define the constitutional relationships of those governments within our federal system. The speech from the throne starts with a very simple and proper statement of the situation with regard to external affairs. It says:

The first concern of government in world affairs is to ensure peace and security. To this end, Canada continues to support the principles of the united nations charter.

It then goes on to discuss foreign policy. No one will disagree with the fact that the first concern of this and every other government and every other parliamentary body is to do everything humanly possible to preserve peace and to protect the people in the country which it serves. But there is another matter of almost as great importance, the constitution itself. Without an understandable constitution, an enforceable constitution, it is difficult for any nation to continue its course as a united nation. The constitution is in fact the framework upon which the national structure is built.

Yesterday the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) stated that he had been invited to visit the President of the United States. I feel sure that every hon. member in this house will welcome the fact that the Prime Minister is going to have personal discussions on important subjects with the head of that great and friendly nation with which we are so closely associated. I hope it will be remembered that in the United States particular emphasis in public life is placed upon the constitution. As the Prime Minister, in the early stages of his responsibilities, is going to establish contact with the President of the United States, I hope he will keep in mind the oath which the president takes when he assumes office. It is a simple oath which reads:

I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

I for one do not feel that Canadians should follow the pattern of any other country except where they find that that may be useful. However, I think it would be well for us to recognize the importance which is given in the United States to the constitution as the foundation of all their governmental responsibility. It is noticeable that the oath taken by the governor of every state in the United States when he is sworn in contains a similar provision, that to the best of his ability he will defend the constitution of his state and the constitution of the United States.

I believe the time has come when it is essential that the head of the government in

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Canada and all members of the government should have some feeling of responsibility for preserving the constitution of this country. This has been one of the great strengths of the democracy with which we are so closely associated. Our constitution is threatened today by a carefully planned effort to deny the provincial governments the opportunity to carry on their own affairs with the freedom and discretion which comes from independent taxing sources which will make them free to determine the things that they can do.

For that reason I propose to devote the remainder of my remarks to the necessity of a return in this country to the true principles of the federal system and to the recognition of the fact that national unity in Canada became possible under that federal system and that national unity can be continued only if that federal system is respected in fact as well as in name.

At six o'clock the house took recess.

After Recess

The house resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, at six o'clock I was referring to the constitutional position and to the steps this government has taken to centralize authority under the dominion government. I propose now to discuss the broad constitutional problem, with particular reference to what have been generally described as dominion-provincial relations.

Until a very few weeks ago my responsibilities lay in another field. Consequently I neither had the opportunity nor was it particularly my duty to deal with statements that might be made in other parts of Canada about what had taken place at the dominion-provincial conference, or about the present situation in regard to that gathering. The reason I feel I should deal with this subject in this speech, during the debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne, is that this is the first opportunity I have had in the House of Commons to correct some extraordinary statements that have been made about what did take place at that conference, and to place on record the sequence of events which led up to the adjournment of the conference in May, 1946, and to say why today I feel it is so necessary that this conference be reconvened if we are not to increase the constitutional confusion already existing in Canada.

This is no new subject. It has been a matter of concern to thoughtful Canadians for many years, and in 1937 this government, under the previous Prime Minister, appointed