

*Accession of King George VI*

the demise of the throne parliament can carry on, I submit that so also can a member retain his seat. But I have no desire to make a scene, and further than that I do not think the matter is of sufficient importance—

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: —for me to take the action that Mr. Bradlaugh did in England a good many years ago.

I would point out that this house has a very slight knowledge of what actually took place in Great Britain. We have had to depend very largely upon newspaper accounts and radio messages. I have a notice on the order paper asking for the production of papers relative to the abdication of King Edward VIII. These should be before the house, I submit, before the bill is discussed, and the bill should be passed before the address is moved. It is true that the Prime Minister has not absolutely refused to bring down the papers, but he said yesterday that he had consulted with Mr. Baldwin and is consulting with the prime ministers of other dominions to see what they are going to do. I hope the time will come before very long when the Prime Minister of Canada will decide these matters on their merits—

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: May I say to my hon. friend that correspondence is two-sided, and one is not at liberty, where correspondence is confidential, to bring down correspondence unless he has the consent of the other party to the correspondence.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: Well, I submit that when matters of great concern are at stake the members of parliament ought not to be expected to act without an intelligent knowledge of the grounds on which action is to be taken. I have no desire in this matter to do any muck-raking, but the people of this country have the right to know the fundamental facts of the case. Why all this haste and secrecy? Was Mr. Baldwin's action, after all, caused by pressure from the dominions? Whose statement are we to accept, that of Mr. Baldwin or that of our own Prime Minister? I think such questions are important.

I have here a cartoon by Low which represents a procession secretly in the dead of night in which the throne and the demised crown are being transferred under a policy of "hush," "silence" and "mystery," while the press and public opinion have been gagged. It seems to me that our Prime Minister is quite willing to join in that procession.

The government have introduced this bill. If the action of the government on December

[Mr. Woodsworth.]

10 was constitutional, surely further legislation is unnecessary. Within a few hours of the Prime Minister's statement of December 10 I wired him saying—

As a member of parliament pledged to loyalty to King Edward VIII—

As we all were at that time.

—I protest against the usurpation by the cabinet of the powers of parliament.

That, I believe, was before the order in council was passed.

There are two questions that persist in my mind. First, why should our Prime Minister, in connivance with Mr. Baldwin, be in a position to absolve me and other members from our declaration of loyalty to King Edward VIII; and, second, why should the Liberal party be in a position to decide who is to be king of the Canadian people? I am not indulging in captious criticism; I am simply trying to emphasize the importance of the precedent which has been and is being set. The Prime Minister relies, I suppose, upon a fait accompli, but in bringing this about he has deliberately set aside an important statute and acted contrary to a constitutional convention. Doubtless the Prime Minister was in a difficult position, I concede that; but the cost of pleasing the British government has been altogether too great.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I do not wish to interrupt, but I must take exception to my hon. friend's statement. There was no question of trying to please the British government. When we come to the measure itself I think I shall be able to show the house that the government's action in every particular complied with the Statute of Westminster and was satisfactory.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: I can only use my own judgment, but it seems to me that this action has made the Statute of Westminster a farce. While in Winnipeg the Native Sons were celebrating the anniversary of the passing of the Westminster act, a Liberal prime minister of Canada was lending himself to rubber-stamping a decision of the government of the United Kingdom. Further, so far as Canada is concerned we have once more gone back to government by order in council, thus setting a most dangerous precedent. If the Prime Minister can choose our king he can declare war or commit this country to any policy of less importance than the selection of the head of the state.

It seems to me that the Prime Minister has rather shifted his ground from the position taken in the public statement he gave to the