

Legislation Respecting Railway Matters

● (3:40 p.m.)

On the flag question I took a strong position. Parliament acted, and I have accepted the decision of parliament. Sir, if we come to a situation, by reason of the conduct of a government that is irresponsible in its attitude, where disobedience of the law is brought about, we will have the end of civilized society.

I have said before that those in the ranks of labour, and I have acted for them, are law-abiding. But some in those ranks are aroused today by the cavalier methods adopted by this government. I do not like to say this but the facts must be frankly faced. This government today lacks the moral power to lead the nation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: They have failed in this and in so many matters to meet their responsibilities. There are individual ministers who do not come within that category. But in the solidarity or lack of solidarity of the cabinet, there has been a failure of leadership and panic at the last moment.

I say to the government that in every part of the world the psychology of lawlessness and disregard of the law is expanding. There are some today who believe they can flout the law for their own ends when the occasion demands. I want parliament, and I implore the government of the day even now, to bring about amendments to this bill as it stands so that there will not be aroused within this nation a feeling of disrespect for parliament and for the legislation passed by parliament.

It is a serious thing, perhaps the most serious matter that democracies have to face, that in so many countries many are coming to believe that there is no great wrong in ignoring or flouting the law so long as it can be justified on the basis of a personal conviction that the law is wrong. Sir, there is a way to change a law that is believed to be wrong and bad and that is not by breaking it but by changing the law at its source.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I was disappointed yesterday in the Prime Minister's speech because he did not then, or when addressing the nation, place before the people of Canada the position that whatever the situation may be, a law will not be passed by parliament unless that law meets those principles of equity and justice that ought to emanate from parliament, the fountain of justice.

The government asks for co-operation. I offered that co-operation and it was spurned, not receiving even the acknowledgement of passing approval. The government went ahead on its own. It got itself into a mess. It got the Canadian economy into a serious impasse. Now it comes before parliament and says: "Whatever we present to you you have to accept. This is what we want done regardless of the equity". That is not the spirit in which problems like this are solved. I say this because I have been greatly concerned over suggestions by various individuals, including one within parliament speaking outside parliament, that the flouting of a law which is not agreeable is permissible and even admirable.

I hope this parliament will act. I disagree with the manner in which the government has acted. This legislation should be redrawn to give justice and equity. In its present form it cannot but result in further divisions within this nation. Sir, I love this institution. Let us not do anything here which will give the slightest encouragement to those who preach the doctrine of civil disobedience. Let us carefully avoid adding fuel to the fires of lawlessness and contempt for the law which are smouldering, not only in our own country, but in other democracies. Even yet, take back this legislation in its present form.

I say to those sitting opposite: You must realize now that it is not workable in the manner in which you have drafted it. Let us work together to secure a fair and equitable law. I am sorry to say I cannot designate this bill as belonging in that category. Let us work together to secure a fair and equitable challenge the Canadian people, those directly and indirectly affected, to support it. We in Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition do not intend to make any further speeches on the subject until we get into committee in the event that the house gives this legislation second reading. Disagreeing with the bill, condemning the government which has brought forth this monstrosity, we still say that, if it becomes law, it requires the support of us all because it will then be a decision of parliament, however much we disagree with it.

We tried to co-operate, and for two weeks our attempts were spurned. We are prepared to do so now if the government, in a spirit of co-operation, is willing to withdraw this legislation in its present form. As it now stands it resembles one of the laws of the