

The Address—Mr. Pearson

There may be strong differences of opinion and indeed there are at this time—but perhaps a committee of this kind would serve a purpose not only in getting the information before the country but in resolving the differences in parliament in this important matter. A parliamentary standing committee of more than 50 members which has been told by the Prime Minister himself that it must not discuss policy questions is not in my view suitable for this kind of examination.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Does the hon. gentleman suggest that any committee under our system should discuss policy?

Mr. Pearson: It certainly could, Mr. Speaker, if it were set up for this purpose. It could bring in recommendations, get advice on policy and ask the minister about policy questions. It certainly could discuss policy.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That is not what Mr. St. Laurent said.

Mr. Pearson: There is one standing committee which by tradition, and indeed I think by order now, does study policy, and that is the committee on external affairs. The Prime Minister knows this because he has discussed many policy questions before that committee. If it can be done in the committee on external affairs it could be done as an exception to the general rule at this time and in these circumstances with respect to defence.

I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not suggesting that even before this kind of committee any serving officer of the defence forces could be asked any questions that have anything to do with policy because that is a tradition we would not wish to see broken before any committee. We do not do it in the committee on external affairs. But the Secretary of State for External Affairs in the standing committee certainly discusses policy and so do the members of the committee. I suggest that perhaps the same procedure could be adopted in relation to this committee which, however, should be much smaller in number than the committee on external affairs.

I ask the government what it proposes to do to show that it is aware of the seriousness of the situation beyond hinting that we are likely to have disarmament shortly, and perhaps intimating we can knock off two or three million dollars from our defence estimates, or beyond offering us the comforting thought that if the tragedy of war were to occur the west would knock the stuffing out of the Russians.

[Mr. Pearson.]

I wish now to leave the question of defence and foreign policy and deal as briefly as possible, although it is an important and complicated subject, with some of the economic conditions that we face in this country and some of the problems that arise from this.

We on this side were accused in the last session of parliament, we have been accused during the recess by the Prime Minister and his colleagues, and no doubt we will be accused within the next couple of hours of being prophets of doom and gloom.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Is that a guilty conscience that is speaking?

Mr. Pearson: No, Mr. Speaker, I am just anticipating the Prime Minister's normal gambit. The Prime Minister attempts to buttress this kind of attack, of course, by attributing to us statements we have never made and I refer particularly to some of the broadcasts of his public speeches where the facts as he states them are so far removed from the true facts as to be hardly recognizable. It is his tactic to attribute to us—and he will do it again later, I am sure,—statements about unemployment, inflation, tight money and trade which we have never made. He delights in setting up straw men and then knocking them down with great verve and vigour. To him, I am sure, this is a very satisfying performance but it is not very significant.

Let us look at the record, not the record, I hasten to add, as it appears in the blue book, that comic strip put out by the Prime Minister's party, but the record of the facts. I shall begin by saying at once that we had a year of recovery in 1959 for which all Canadians should be joyous.

Mr. Diefenbaker: That was not your prediction last January.

Mr. Pearson: I shall come to our predictions of last January and show how much more correct they were than the Prime Minister's. I might assure the hon. gentleman who I observe is reaching for his brief case that he will have ample opportunity to get his documents out because I will continue to speak until six o'clock.

I believe all Canadians may take satisfaction in the recovery that took place in 1959. As a matter of fact, the progress we have made merely confirms the words of the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Walker) who I wish was in his seat because this is the first time I have referred to him in debate since he became a member of the cabinet. The progress we have made merely confirms the words of that hon. gentleman uttered in Quebec as recently as January 11 last as quoted