

The Address—Mr. St. Laurent

that something be done at once for the immediate relief of those who are suffering from unemployment. In the speech from the throne hon. gentlemen will have noticed the announcement that the Minister of Labour (Mr. Gregg) will have two bills to submit at the earliest possible moment, the first to provide immediately an extension of supplementary benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act. I understand that this matter has been discussed with members of all groups in the house and that immediate action will be possible to deal with that special measure.

Hon. gentlemen will have noticed that there is ready for consideration by parliament a much larger volume of business proposed by the government than has been ready at this stage in any previous session. On the order paper at the present time there are notices of resolutions for fifteen government measures which require to be preceded by resolution and there were two which, not requiring resolutions, received first reading today. There is a third which is already on the order paper. Five government measures have been sent to the clerk of the other place for introduction there. One was introduced on the opening day and the four others are to be introduced immediately for consideration. That is a very large volume of business ready for consideration.

Traditionally the debate on the address has occupied many days at the opening of a session. There have been suggestions that that was because there was no business in which members were really interested ready for their consideration, and that instead of leaving them in a position where they felt that their views had to be expressed on the address or else there would be no opportunity for expressing them, it would be helpful if they could have in advance an indication of what was coming up for discussion so they might then reserve their speeches for the debates on those different measures.

We are endeavouring to meet the suggestions that have been made from time to time to overcome this feeling that the business of parliament is not properly organized and not handled in a businesslike way. During the opening days of the last session the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Drew), in supporting a motion for the immediate establishment of a committee, said, as appears at page 397 of *Hansard* of November 27, 1953:

... the expeditious handling of business will not be related nearly so much to any limitation of time on speeches or anything of that kind as it will to some orderly method of presenting business and setting up committees at the earliest possible stage . . .

We are presenting the business at the earliest possible stage and we will be glad of the opportunity to set up some committees at the earliest possible stage. We propose to suggest, as an experiment for this session, that there be set up an estimates committee to which the estimates of several departments could be referred for detailed consideration before coming before the committee of supply of the house.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Is the Prime Minister in a position to say which departments?

Mr. St. Laurent: There will be five or six which will be referred consecutively to this committee so we can have a serious experiment made as to the effect it will have upon securing better consideration of the estimates than is sometimes possible toward the end of the session, in the case of those that have not been studied before.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Which departments did the Prime Minister have in mind?

Mr. St. Laurent: At this time I would not like to make any definite statement, but we will try to make the kind of experiment that will give satisfaction to the members of the house generally and will enable them to determine from their own experience whether or not it would be desirable to expand the system and try to arrive at something like that which now prevails in the United Kingdom.

We would like to have the committee on the rules set up at as early a date as possible. Without doing what the Leader of the Opposition had in mind in his statement of last November, without doing much in the way of limiting the time of speeches or anything of that kind, we feel there are many improvements that can be made that would avoid some of the time required under the present rules to deal with the matters on the order paper. For instance, these resolutions preparatory to the introduction of bills, under the rules, have to be called on a government day. When they are first called nothing more can be done than declare to the house that they are recommended by His Excellency the Governor General, and they have to go over to another day.

There are certain of these phases which, if not eliminated, can certainly be streamlined so the business can be proceeded with in a more expeditious fashion and so there may not be this feeling that during the first weeks of a session there is lots of time and much of it can be taken for speeches in the house that might otherwise be directed towards the furthering of these stages of items of legislation.