

in touch with the country and of giving it the views of the people on great public issues. Have we not all observed how jealously England guards the rights pertaining to the representation of her people in Parliament? We watch our newspapers to see the results of by-elections in the old land as they occur from week to week or from month to month; and in the meantime no attention whatever is paid to the necessity for holding by-elections in our own country. If we are to preserve the spirit of the constitution, which stands for the right of representation of the people in Parliament, we must seek to give to the people the right of representation as soon as possible after a vacancy in an electoral district occurs.

There is one other point that is of importance in considering the essential conditions of parliamentary Government. Parliament should be not only a representative assembly, but also a deliberative assembly. It should be a means of keeping the people informed of the public business and of having all matters of concern to them freely and openly discussed. I shall not attempt to present in detail a statement of the extent to which there has been demoralization in this connection during and since the period of the war. I shall point out, however, three very obvious particulars which are of importance if we are to have a restoration of our political institutions.

Take first the Speech from the Throne, to which we have just listened. If that time-honoured custom has any purpose whatever, it is that of acquainting Parliament, and, through Parliament, the people, with the questions that are to come up for discussion and consideration here. Well, Sir, I have only to mention the last session of Parliament and what took place then to direct the attention of the House and the country to how far we have departed from that important safeguard of a people's rights and liberties. The most important measure that was put through this Parliament last session—the most important financially in the history of Canada—was the Bill for the acquisition of the Grand Trunk Railway system; yet in the speech from the Throne of last session no mention whatever was made of the Government's intention to bring down legislation of that kind. How were the people of the country to be expected to anticipate the bringing down of such an important measure? Had reference been made to it in the speech from the Throne, we should have had an opportunity to hear from different parts of Canada an expression of opinion in regard to

[Mr. King.]

its merits and the legislation itself might have been vastly improved as a consequence. I say at once to the Acting Prime Minister that if the Government has other legislation in contemplation at this session of which no mention has been made in the speech from the Throne, we hope that the Government will announce to the House at the earliest possible moment what that legislation is to be. That is owing to the House; it is owing to the country.

Why, Sir, what an occasion of surprise it is to us when almost the day after His Excellency delivers the Speech from the Throne an announcement—it appears on the Order Paper—is made that the Government intends to introduce two amendments to the British North America Act. I shall not now discuss the proposed amendments; I shall not question what they are or what is the necessity for them. But I should like to point out that on only six occasions since the days of Confederation has the British North America Act been amended. If when the Speech from the Throne was delivered it was the intention of hon. gentlemen opposite to bring down an amendment to the British North America Act, they might at least have had the courtesy to tell His Excellency of it and to have had His Excellency so inform this House and the people. The amending of the Constitution is no small matter; it is a much more important matter than the amending of any drug Act, any copyright or patent law, or any of the things that are spoken of in the speech from the Throne. It is in one sense the most important matter which this Parliament can be called upon to consider. So I say, Mr. Speaker, that in these matters we have been departing altogether from the principles of parliamentary government. If you seek the cause of the unrest which prevails throughout the country, you will find it in these departures from a system of representative and responsible Government.

In this connection I may, perhaps, appropriately say a word in regard to Supply. The voting of Supply is the only way in which the people can exercise their control over Parliament and Parliament its control over the Government. We have all observed that in previous sessions, while items of supply might be brought down early or late, at the very end of the session just when members were leaving, further large appropriations were asked for. Well, Sir, under such conditions it is impossible for the people to exercise the control which they should have over public expenditure;