

The Address—Mr. St. Laurent

Majesty's coronation next June. I think we were all gratified to see to what an extent we are of one mind, as was demonstrated on the occasion of Her Majesty's visit as Princess Elizabeth about a year ago. The enthusiasm with which she and her distinguished consort were greeted on the occasion of their visits to so many parts of Canada is, I think, a very satisfactory demonstration of the attachment of all our people to the kind of institutions under which our country has grown and under which I hope it will continue for very many generations to administer and take care of its public affairs.

Because that is our system, because we feel it is a good system for the administration of our public affairs, I extend congratulations to the Leader of the Opposition for the very frank and, perhaps some of us may sometimes think, severe criticism of the actions of the government. It is a part of our democratic institutions that there should be someone recognized in our official organizations whose duty it is to watch and criticize what is being done by the advisers of the crown, and I think it is helpful that that should be so. For three and a half years now the government has been attempting to discharge the mandate entrusted to it in 1949. It has not had too much time available to answer criticism, but it has always given close attention to criticism and has always been as attentive as it could be to remedy such weaknesses as the criticism revealed.

But it is also a part of our constitution and traditions that within a certain number of months now, possibly a year but not more than two in any event, the people of Canada will be called upon to pass judgment on the conduct of the government and on the criticism levelled against the government. I think it is proper that at that time the public should have before it all the information that could have a bearing upon the determination of its verdict when it is called upon to arrive at one.

The last item dealt with by the hon. gentleman was that of dominion-provincial, and now municipal, constitutional relations. He repeated a warning that has been current at almost all times during the whole period since the coming into force of confederation itself, namely that there was a formidable question that had to be determined, the continued existence of a federal system or the establishment of a unitary system. That is a problem that has been constant in our history ever since 1867. There have been periods when to some of us it appeared that the pendulum was swinging too far one way and to others it appeared that it was swinging too far the other way. At other times

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not too distant it has appeared to the same gentleman that there were excesses in different directions. I have here an extract from a report in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* of February 4, 1937. It is attributed to "Colonel Drew" and as I would not want to be mistaken about the office the hon. gentleman occupied at that time I will merely refer to the note as I have it here:

Extract from Colonel Drew's speech, February 3, 1937. "Today politics mean more than they ever did before in the history of Canada", Colonel Drew said, in pointing out that Canada was far too over-governed. "We must start all over again from Confederation, if we are to have one country instead of nine", he said.

Bit by bit the provinces have assumed powers acquired through court decisions that were meant for the federal government, Colonel Drew declared. Holding up the example of Great Britain where, he said, twenty cabinet ministers govern millions of people, Colonel Drew contended that in Canada it took between 100 and 110 ministers to govern eleven million people. "Our country is over-governed, in some ways the worst governed country in the world," he said. "We must get back to one strong government."

I do not agree, and I do not think the hon. gentleman now agrees with the hon. gentleman of 1937.

Mr. Drew: Yes, I do; but that was not the end of the quotation.

Mr. St. Laurent: That is the end of the extract I have here. I am glad that the hon. gentleman does not agree with the hon. gentleman of 1937.

Mr. Drew: I do, entirely.

Mr. St. Laurent: I do not envisage the situation as being as terrifying as he has portrayed it to us today. Here he is suggesting that there should be a conference to re-allocate fields of taxation so that the municipalities and provinces would have ample room to impose and collect themselves everything they might feel they required for the discharge of their growing responsibilities.

With respect to the allocation of taxation fields, I think that was perhaps more pertinent to the problem that existed in 1945 than it is to the situation that exists at the present time. Since 1945 the federal government has withdrawn from several fields of taxation that it had been necessary for the federal government to occupy in order to raise the sums required to assure the security of this country during the second world war. For instance, the government retired from the field of taxation on amusements, pari-mutuel betting, sales of electricity, gasoline, railway transportation and telecommunications and exchange tax. The only fields in which the federal government is at the present time are those of customs and excise, including sales taxes; personal and corporate