

then and not till then did the Prime Minister and his government decide that immediate inquiry must be made and something definite done. I do not know whether the Duncan report as presented to the House meets with the approval of the people in the Maritime provinces; I do not know what action my right hon. friend and his government contemplate in regard to that report. But I know this, that if any proper action is taken, if any satisfaction is given to the maritime provinces as a result of the Duncan report the credit for anything done will be due to hon. gentlemen sitting on this side of the House who carried on the campaign in this parliament last year.

Mr. MOTHERWELL: Oh, oh!

Mr. GUTHRIE: The Minister of Agriculture laughs. I am now discussing business matters and I am sure he does not understand them. I do not think that he has ever given a moment's thought to maritime rights during his whole five years in office, unless he also was rudely awakened by the debates in this chamber last spring. The case for maritime rights as presented in this House by Conservative members last session has seldom if ever been equalled in parliament. I would ask my right hon. friend (Mr. Mackenzie King) this question: Would he be good enough in his remarks to-day, for instance, to give some indication of what his government proposes to do in respect of this matter? In the speech from the throne it is merely stated that the government intends to take the subject into its consideration and that certain legislation in respect thereto will be introduced. This is a matter of the greatest interest to hon. gentlemen from the maritime provinces, and if the Prime Minister would go so far as to indicate just in what way government action is intended I am sure the information would be gratefully received on this side of the House.

And now I desire before concluding my remarks to make some more or less extended observations upon another subject mentioned in the speech from the throne. I refer to the Imperial conference which has recently taken place in the ancient capital of the empire, the report of which conference was laid on the table of the House on Friday last. Apparently there are two opinions in Canada concerning the exact meaning and scope of the report which was issued by the committee of prime ministers which met and agreed upon it. There is one section of our people who are inclined to think that there is nothing really new or of great moment in any of the clauses or in any of the suggestions contained

[Mr. Guthrie.]

in the report; there is another view that the whole report is possibly the most momentous state document that has ever been tabled in the parliament of Canada. I believe that the people of Canada and probably the press at this moment lack the necessary information to enable them to reach a satisfactory conclusion in regard to this interesting document. Personally I view it as a matter of very great consequence, but in any opinion which I am disposed to offer to-day, I shall have to make reservations. I cannot offer at the present time anything in the nature of an unalterable opinion, for the reason that there are some aspects of the report which I do not yet profess to understand.

This Imperial conference evidently has been something in the nature of a constitutional conference. I had the opportunity last July or August of glancing over the agenda which indicated in a general way the subjects which were to be discussed, and from my recollection of what I saw in the agenda I may say that I had not the faintest idea that anything in the nature of a constitutional conference was contemplated. I think I am within the fact in saying that when my right hon. friend and his colleague, the Minister of Justice, left Canada to attend the conference, neither of them had the remotest idea that the chief subject for discussion at the conference would be the constitutional status of Great Britain and of the overseas dominions by a committee of prime ministers of the empire. Our ministers had no notice of it; they had no time for preparation; they had no time for consultation with the people of this country; they had no time to obtain any mandate from the people. They went to London to discuss the questions which appeared on the agenda and I have no doubt that the actual deliberations of the conference were perhaps as great a surprise to them as to the rest of the people of Canada.

There is a strong public opinion in Canada that when we venture to make constitutional changes, or even to propose them, the ground should be fairly well prepared in advance and some hard thinking should previously take place. There is the feeling that careful preparation is indispensable before we venture upon the dangerous subject of constitutional changes. Indeed, Canadian statesmen and others have gone so far as to suggest that if any constitutional conference were ever called it should follow the lines of the first constitutional conference held in