

THE SENATE

Friday, January 15, 1926.

The Senate met at 3 p.m., the Speaker in the Chair.

Prayers and routine proceedings.

THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S SPEECH

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Senate proceeded to the consideration of His Excellency the Governor General's Speech at the opening of the Session.

Hon. JOHN LEWIS moved:

That the following Address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General to offer the humble thanks of this House to His Excellency for the gracious Speech which he has been pleased to make to both Houses of Parliament; namely:

To General His Excellency the Right Honourable Julian Hedworth George, Baron Byng of Vimy, General on the Retired List and in the Reserve of Officers of the Army; Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath; Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George; Member of the Royal Victorian Order, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of the Dominion of Canada.

May it Please Your Excellency:

We, His Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Senate of Canada, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Excellency for the gracious Speech which Your Excellency has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

He said: Honourable gentlemen, I have to offer what is not an unusual apology for new members, namely, that I shall be obliged to consult my notes, to an extent which is possibly not in accordance with the fixed rules of this House; but I am accustomed to express my opinions with my pen rather than with my voice, and I can assure you that my effort to speak without notes would be as painful for you as for myself.

Necessarily we approach our task in a manner somewhat different from those who live the more strenuous life of the other Chamber. It is not our business to make or break Governments, to influence the fortunes of parties, to look for partisan motives in the Speech which it is our duty to examine. We have simply to consider the various proposals on their merits as subjects of legislation which may come before us at a later day in a more specific form.

The programme of legislation, as honourable gentlemen will perceive, is unusually full, and I shall not occupy your time in endeavouring to deal with the whole of it in detail.

As to the tariff, the Speech declares that a general increase would be detrimental to the country's continued prosperity and prejudicial

to national unity. It lays stress upon the harmful influence of uncertainty in regard to the tariff, and, as a means of preventing that, it announces the appointment of an Advisory Board to make careful study of the tariff.

The tariff has been a bone of contention for nearly fifty years of confederated Canada, at least since the time when the National Policy, as it was called, was proposed. On one side there was used occasionally language pointing to free trade, and on the other language pointing to high protection; but when it came to a question of practical administration, we find neither a Liberal Government giving us a free trade as it was in England, nor a Conservative Government giving us a high protection as it was in the United States. It has been remarked that the difference in the general percentage of duties under Liberal and Conservative Governments was not very great. That was due, I think, not to any insincerity on either side, but to the fact that successive ministers of finance, Liberal and Conservative, found themselves faced with practical difficulties which in the freedom of opposition they had not fully considered.

The percentage, however, does not tell the whole story. A tariff is a highly complicated structure composed of several thousand items, and its influence upon industry depends largely on the skillful or unskillful adjustment of details and the relation of one duty to another. For that reason it seems to be a proper subject for the study of such an Advisory Board as is promised in the Speech. It is upon that ground alone that the proposal appeals to me. The control of the tariff should always be in the House of Commons, and the function of the Board should be simply information and advice. There has never been, apart from the excellent departmental reports, of which I think we have not fully availed ourselves, any attempt at a systematic and continuous observation of industrial conditions and the relation of tariffs thereto, or any attempt to use these observations in a scientific way. Ministers of Finance have been largely influenced by interested persons asking for tariff favours. Members of Parliament, in discussing the tariff, have been obliged to depend upon facts, or alleged facts, gathered in a somewhat haphazard way. It is not proposed, as I understand, that the Advisory Board shall usurp the powers of the Government or the House of Commons, but that it shall furnish a body of well-arranged and marshalled information.

Now, as to the course which ought to be pursued when these facts are available, I will