

The Address—Mr. Diefenbaker

I also want to add a word of personal regret concerning the circumstances which made necessary the resignation of the Hon. George Drew and to say through you, sir, to the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) that we on this side of the house wish to thank him and his colleagues for the words spoken by him regarding the outstanding contribution made by Mr. Drew to the public service and to Canada both in war and in peace. We couple therewith the hope that it will not be long before he will be restored to his former vitality and health and again able to take his place in the public affairs of our country.

Having said that, I am going to step immediately into a discussion of the speech from the throne. It is a somewhat lengthy document containing a rather extended reference to Canada's external affairs, to the Canada Council and federal grants, to the intention to amend the Municipal Grants Act which we in the opposition have advocated for so long, and to the necessity of certain statutes being amended. One is struck by the fact, however, that regarding an important issue facing Canada at this hour there is but a short and uncertain reference. I refer of course to the paragraph dealing with the strike in which the following words appear:

In the last few days a serious industrial dispute has led to a stoppage of work on one of the major railways of Canada despite the use of the normal processes of conciliation. Special efforts have been made and are continuing to be made by my ministers to assist the parties to reach an agreed settlement.

That is a casual reference which calls apparently for cavalier contemplation of a situation which is dangerous, critical and crippling in its economic effects. This strike has now been in continuance for one week and with the exception of periodical statements which are more or less hopeful in their import there has been no declaration made by the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) or by the Minister of Labour (Mr. Gregg) regarding this very serious matter.

Across the country we find ourselves in this position today. In various parts of the maritimes which are served only by the Canadian Pacific railway a situation exists which is detrimental to the areas affected. Because of the tremendous glut of wheat, areas on the prairies served by the Canadian Pacific railway are faced with a critical situation. Yet all that parliament is vouchsafed is a pious declaration that special efforts have been made and are continuing to be made.

The motion introduced today by the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggart (Mr. Coldwell) is one which we had considered. We felt that under the rules it would not have been possible to move such a motion successfully.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

Indeed if it had been accepted the adjournment would have been only for today, but now there is an opportunity available—not only today but in the days ahead as changes take place—to discuss this matter which vitally affects the Canadian people.

Warehouses and docks are piled high with cargo. Unemployment is occurring because of necessary layoffs of men in industries directly affected by the strike. The common council of Saint John, New Brunswick, on Saturday declared a state of emergency. Prayers were offered in the Roman Catholic churches for a settlement. That is a summary of the press reference I have here and I do not intend to go into further detail.

What does the government do? It continues its policy of being resolute in irresolution. What has it done? This is not a new problem. This matter has been before the government for months. There has been postponement and procrastination, there have been promises that something is going to turn up. We have had daily repetition of promises for the future.

What does the government intend to do? That is a question which the Prime Minister must answer this afternoon. Across this country people are asking, "What do you intend to do?" Remember that the results flowing from automation are not of recent development. One year ago Mr. Jodoin suggested the setting up of a commission on the problems of automation. He stated the other day that if his suggestions in that regard had been met the strike might very well have been avoided.

Let us go back to 1950. In 1950 the situation of course was more general than it is today. In 1950 the strike was outlawed. In 1953 the Prime Minister indicated that if a strike then threatening was carried into effect action similar to that taken in 1950 would be taken.

Mr. St. Laurent (Quebec East): I am sure the Leader of the Opposition does not want to go further than I went. I advised them that parliament would be called immediately.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Parliament would be called to act. That is what the promise was. Then in 1956, a few days before Christmas, the press reported that the Prime Minister had stated—I know that he has since said in a rather uncertain way that he was not properly reported—that—

Mr. St. Laurent (Quebec East): If the hon. member wants to know what happened let me say that from half-past eleven o'clock of the night before I was getting continuous calls. I told everyone that if there was any statement to be made it would be made from