

Interim Supply

Canadian public right now in a general election campaign.

What have we had this year, Mr. Chairman? We have had a year of strikes and ineptitude by the government, with more strikes coming up. We have had a government that has not carried out any of the promises it made to the people during the last general election campaign. Today the old age pensioner does not even have a bill before this house to make provision for him, and he does not know what the government are going to do to implement the promise they made. He has no idea at all.

Then we have the postal strike and a strike by the employees of Air Canada as possibilities in the very near future. It is absolutely ridiculous, but that is the situation we are in; and we are in it, thanks to the government.

● (3:30 p.m.)

The government pays no attention to anybody in the house or in the country who talks about unification. Almost every newspaper in the country supports the just demands of the opposition. That is why the government's attitude is so amazing to me. Almost every newspaper in Canada is aware of the government's arrogance in this matter. The minister is not uniquely arrogant any more, because yesterday the Prime Minister showed an even greater arrogance in his reply to the hon. member for Peace River who had made a reasonable suggestion. Let me refer the minister to the *Ottawa Journal* to illustrate my point. Let him also look at the *Hamilton Spectator* of November 9, which says that there is a difference in the debate going on now as compared with past debates. This is no longer an irresponsible filibuster in the minds of newspapermen across this country. They believe that the official opposition is right in what it is doing, and that there is a very great principle involved here. While the minister may feel that by and large, the general public could not care less about our national defence policy, responsible people in this country I believe care a great deal. They want to make absolutely certain that what we do with regard to national defence is right.

They are concerned that if we go on as the minister wants us to do, while possibly no errors may be made nevertheless some errors might be made that cannot be corrected. How does anybody know whether or not that is so? The minister says we have absolutely nothing to fear, and that his policy is right. But the minister has at his disposal the only people

[Mr. Coates.]

who can advise really whether the policy is right or wrong. Those people are not available to us. We shall only know about this policy if we can call these men before a committee, have them answer our questions, and so eliminate our concern. Should we accept, as the Minister of Transport suggested last year, the policy of a minority government affecting the future of this nation just because in their opinion that policy is right? We should hear the pros and cons of this matter before being asked to make an educated appraisal on second reading.

We cannot go on talking forever about this subject in this chamber. The government needs money to run the country, and that money is not available. If the government thought yesterday we were bluffing it should be obvious today that we are not, and that we are as serious and determined as they are to see that things are done properly. There may be hope yet for this parliament, because the house leader is back and he has common sense. He will meet with officials of other parties. Let us hope he can make common sense prevail among his colleagues, because if they do not listen to common sense we may very well have an election campaign that nobody really wants. I hate to think of what will happen to the Liberals or Conservatives if we have such an election campaign. We cannot have elections every year. They are becoming annual affairs in this nation, and they develop from the ineptitude of this government which seems unable to stick to the priorities it establishes at the beginning of a session. The government does not realize when it gets off the track, and does not know how to get back once it is off.

At the beginning of a session the government lists its priorities, telling us what work it wants done. Already in this parliament we have done more work to date than most parliaments are asked to do. And what happens? Suddenly the government goes off the tracks and takes the country with it; there is a vacuum in leadership. There is no leadership in the house or in the country.

An hon. Member: What leadership? Tory leadership?

Mr. Coates: An hon. member says what leadership? Let me say that there was leadership in this nation when the Conservatives were in power. There was none of this wrangling in parliament that we had during the flag debate, and that we are having in this interim supply debate. This happens because