

Hon. Mr. LAMBERT: In due course, I suppose I shall reach that state of philosophic calm so aptly depicted by Tennyson in the later years of his life, when he wrote:

Raving politics never at rest—as this poor earth's pale history runs—  
What is it all but a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million million suns?

The Speech from the Throne this year has been regarded in certain quarters and by some correspondents of the press as being largely a review of outstanding incidents of the past year; and it has been said that its references to the principal matters to come before Parliament this session are rather vague and indefinite. Any element of uncertainty contained in His Excellency's references to future legislation is, to my mind, fully justified by the character of the situation in which Canada finds herself at the present time. While we have gratification expressed at the "substantial advance in Canada's economic recovery" and the attainment to new levels in our national revenues, plans are still discussed for assisting unemployed young people, reminding us of the ever-present spectre of that unsolved problem. Vividly, too, are we reminded of the dire misfortune which drought has brought to once fertile and productive areas in Western Canada. Further references are made to the "strains and stresses" upon Canada's governmental structure and to "the necessity for adjustments." The international situation "continues to give much ground for anxiety." If, therefore, the future of the Government's legislative programme in some respects appears veiled in uncertainty, is the explanation not to be found in the fact that all of us in our personal business affairs, as well as in relation to public questions, are trying to feel our way along carefully from day to day and from week to week?

Yet at the same time one feels that the Speech from the Throne affords much ground for hope. For one thing the interests of agriculture as a basic, social and economic factor in our national life are recognized in the continued activities of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Scheme and in the improvement of marketing facilities organized under the new marketing branch of the Department of Agriculture. We may all hope and pray that more favourable natural conditions will bless the Prairie farmer this year. His has been a valiant fight against adversity during the past seven years, but it has been made easier by Dominion-wide recognition of the fact that it is a struggle of national importance.

The prospect of new trade agreements which will further facilitate a wider exchange of

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commodities throughout the world gives added soundness to our economic outlook and contributes a welcome note of improved international relations. The details of these agreements will be awaited with keenest interest.

Overshadowing in importance all references to economic and financial matters is the issue of national unity foreshadowed in His Excellency's speech. A prolonged discussion of this subject at the present time would be out of place, in view of the current sittings of the royal commission of inquiry. It would seem to me, however, that this great question is one that should appeal with peculiar appropriateness to the mind of this House, and that we should all take the earliest opportunity of expressing the faith that is in us. The test of financial hardship appears to threaten the existence of Confederation, if some of the wild words spoken of late by men in responsible positions are to be taken seriously. I thoroughly believe, however, that the very adversity of these times already gives evidence of stirring to unprecedented heights of achievement the potential spirit of Canadianism, which throughout all the provinces has been quietly gaining strength with the years.

One of the few pieces of new legislation promised in the Speech from the Throne is that arising out of the report of the Special Committee on Elections and Franchise Acts. While the recommendations of that report will not come personally close to any honourable member of this House, they will have a vital bearing upon the character and development of the communities in which we live. Democratic institutions of government in the final analysis are based on the exercise of the franchise by a free people, and I am convinced that certain far-reaching and fundamental changes should be made in our electoral laws to make them more consistent with the democratic ideas we profess. For much enlightenment on this subject one is indebted to several honourable senators for their contributions to a debate in this House some five years ago. I was much struck at the time, and have been more forcibly impressed since, by the remarks of the honourable senator from Saint John (the Hon. the Speaker) and the honourable senator from Vancouver (Hon. Mr. McRae) about the cost of elections. I believe that the suggestions made so frankly by these honourable gentlemen then apply with even greater need and greater truth to conditions prevailing to-day.

The present Dominion Franchise Act—which, one assumes, will be almost completely enveloped in a new Elections Act—