

February 18

'Shadow Boxing' if Session Continued, Col. Drew's View

NO 'BLUEPRINT'

Urging an adjournment of the Ontario Legislature to enable the Government to obtain "clear and specific" information from the Dominion regarding their plans for the immediate future, Lieutenant-Colonel George Drew, Ontario Conservative Leader, told the House yesterday that "we can only discuss our legal and financial requirements when we have some blueprint from which to build; we have nothing now."

Continuing the debate on the Throne Speech, Colonel Drew said the Legislature would only be "shadow boxing" if it proceeded to discuss the administration of the different departments of government before there was complete and understandable information regarding the plans of the Dominion Government for the immediate future.

Colonel Drew criticized the Government for its failure to propose a program of legislation in the Throne Speech. He questioned whether the Legislature should have been called to sit when so little business was ready to be put before it.

"There is far too much to be done elsewhere for us to be sitting here accomplishing no useful purpose simply because it happens that, with the rotation of the months, February is with us once again," said Colonel Drew.

"In normal times it is perfectly proper and perfectly safe for the Provincial Legislature to meet in February and to complete its business while the House of Commons at Ottawa is still sitting. Under the British North America Act the scope of our powers is clearly defined. In peace we know the fields of taxation which are open to this Legislature and those which are not. In peace we know the subjects upon which we can deal and those over which the Dominion Government has exclusive authority.

"But under the wide provisions of the War Measures Act and the Mobilization Act the Dominion Government has assumed tremendous powers," continued Colonel Drew. "Without even consulting the Provinces, the whole effect of the British North America Act has been changed by Order-in-Council. That may be right, or it may be wrong. It may be constitutional, or it may not be constitutional. I am not arguing that point now, but may do so on another occasion. But we know what they have done in almost every field normally occupied exclusively by the Provincial authorities, and it has created almost insuperable difficulties.

"Nothing Before Us."

"There is literally almost nothing before us," said Colonel Drew, speaking of the legislation indicated in the Speech from the Throne. "This speech calls neither for a vote of confidence nor for a vote of want of confidence.

"What are we here to discuss? After a general review of events of the past year, this is all that the Speech from the Throne tells us.

"The proposal of the Government of the Dominion of Canada to take over for the duration of the war the annual revenues from the Provincial corporation tax and the income tax, will be submitted to you. The House will also be asked to consider a measure to provide for taking the votes of enlisted men and women in the service of Canada, wherever stationed.

"In addition to the legislation already mentioned bills will be introduced to amend the municipal act, the highway traffic act, the workmen's compensation act, the mining act, the judicature act, the liquor control act and various other statutes.

"That is all we are told about what we are going to do. There is literally almost nothing before us. We are told that there is going to be a bill to provide for soldiers voting in the event of an election whenever that may be. That will arouse no debate except as to the method of taking the vote. Every one here will agree that some provision must be made for such a vote to be taken. The other references are purely routine.

"What are the things that we should really be tackling? No plans are indicated for agriculture, for industry, for labor, for forestry, or to provide for the future.

"As I look at these words which the Government has placed in the mouth of the Lieutenant-Governor, I cannot refrain from criticism. I do not think we should have been called together with nothing more than this to place before us.

"I will go further. Unless the Government has a program of legislation not indicated in the Speech from the Throne, then I believe this House should adjourn until the Government is ready to place before us measures in keeping with the part this Province must play in the combined war effort of the whole Dominion. I for one am unwilling that we should be mere time-servers in this Legislature simply because it has been the custom to call the Ontario Parliament together in the month of February.

"I wish to bring something else to the attention of the Premier and I do hope this year he will give it due consideration. I want to recall to his memory some of the things I said in this same debate last year. I do so, not for the purpose of proving that I was right on that occasion, but merely in the hope that the correctness of my prediction on that occasion may justify the request that greater attention be paid now to the proposals which I will make.

"In the debate on the Speech from the Throne on Feb. 25, last year, I had this to say:

"Already the Dominion Government has established control over such things as gasoline, power, fuel, timber, prices and rents. In the ordinary course of events all of these fall exclusively under the control of the Provincial Governments. Under the War Measures Act and the Mobilization Act it is doubtful if there is any Provincial field of taxation which cannot be fully occupied by the Dominion Government if it chooses to do so.

This is done by Order-in-Council. There is no public discussion and no debate.

"I am not arguing about the wisdom or otherwise of this course. I am simply explaining the situation as it exists. Whether we like it or not, this and every other Provincial Government can have no way of knowing from day to day what powers they will have tomorrow. They govern on suffrance. This Government is confronted with the simple proposition that during war it cannot lay its financial plans for the future without some effective and continuous working arrangements with the Dominion Government. The same is true of every other Province. How can any budget for the coming year be anything but the wildest guess unless the Government has some intimation regarding the plans of the Dominion Government?"

"I believe every member will recall how I urged that this Government should establish some definite working arrangement with the Dominion Government before passing legislation and preparing a budget.

"We all know what happened. We passed legislation. We adopted a budget. We prorogued. And then some weeks later the Dominion Government, without any consultation so far as I am aware, adopted measures and presented a budget which knocked the props right out from under the whole Provincial structure set up by last year's session of this Legislature. Only now at this session is it intended to introduce an agreement, readjusting matters between the Dominion Government and the Provincial Government, although we thought we had disposed of the very items covered by that agreement in our budget debate last year.

Waste of Time to Sit.

"I do not think we should waste any more time sitting here until our own Government can give us some clear indication of the intentions of the Dominion Government in the various fields of legislation with which we are directly concerned," Colonel Drew continued. "What does this Government know of the intentions of the Dominion Government in regard to agriculture? I, for one, wish to discuss that subject. But I cannot see any use in arguing about what we should do if the measures we adopt are to be changed overnight by an Order-in-Council passed by the Dominion Government. What does this Government know in regard to the intentions of the Dominion Government respecting labor? I had the opportunity to spend some time with that great little Englishman, Ernest Bevin, and I wish to make proposals which I believe would greatly improve the situation here. But nothing will be served by attempting to lay the foundation of better labor relations unless we have some indication of the course to be followed by the Dominion Department of Labor during the present session of the House of Commons.

"Our efforts are necessarily divided into two phases," said Colonel Drew. "First is the consideration of legislation, and the other is the adoption of a budget to provide the necessary finances for the machinery of government in the coming year. I hope the members will agree with me that in these two fields of our endeavors we will only be wasting time if we continue to sit here.

"With all respect to the Lieutenant-Governor, both personally and in his official capacity, I recognize that his words are only the words of his Ministers and I believe that the Speech from the Throne is utterly meaningless so far as it deals with the future until the Ontario Government is in a position to give us some definite information as to what it expects to do during the present session.

"Please do not misunderstand me. I am not suggesting there is nothing useful for this Legislature to do. There is much we can do. Above all we must reduce expenditures in every possible way. But we can only discuss our legal and financial requirements when we have some blueprint from which to build. We have nothing now.

"In all earnestness I urge that this Legislature be adjourned so that this Government may obtain clear and specific information from the Dominion Government regarding its plans for the immediate future. Otherwise, with the very best of intentions and with all the intelligence we can devote to our efforts, we will be creating nothing but men of straw which may be knocked down immediately after-