

I am sure the people of Alberta were bitterly disappointed that the Privy Council has upheld the judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada in declaring the Province's Debt Adjustment Act to be invalid. I fear that their disappointment will be tempered by exasperated resentment, for there is a limit to all things.

It is conceded generally that the provisions of the Debt Adjustment Act afforded very necessary protection to debtors who were unable to meet their intolerable liabilities through no fault of their own against the ruthless and unscrupulous actions of money-lending corporations. Moreover, this legislation, which, in principle, was operative in other Provinces, unquestionably represented the will of an overwhelming majority of people.

For the past seven years we have witnessed a continuous parade to the courts by the moneylending corporations to challenge the validity of one act after another. And with a consistency which has increased the disillusionment of people, the moneylending concerns have always obtained a favourable decision against the Crown representing the people.

This onslaught has been in the nature of a legal war being waged by the moneylending corporations against the people generally and the farmers in particular, for the dual purpose of territorial gains by divesting them of their property, and of placing them in utter subjection to the dictates of these financial overlords. Their objective is to acquire a land monopoly to strengthen the stranglehold of their financial power.

When this country was plunged into war beside Great Britain to fight for our very existence, at least these moneylending corporations could have assisted the war effort by declaring an armistice. Instead they not only carried on this private war against the people, but they intensified their attack. I hope that the full significance of that will not be overlooked by Canadians.

Finally the High Command of the moneylenders unleashed a blitzkrieg. They succeeded in breaking through what they considered to be the main defences which stood between them and the people by having the Debt Adjustment Act declared ultra vires and by having the Moratorium Act tied up in the courts. No doubt they feel that now all they have to do is to march in and take possession.

However, they are wrong. Canada is still a constitutional democracy - and thank God that it is. And because of that fact there is a court which is a higher authority than any legal body which has to interpret the law. In a democracy the people are the supreme and final authority. If the law conflicts with the will of the people, the law must be changed; if the constitution thwarts the will of the people, then the constitution must be altered. In a democracy the people are the supreme authority, but that authority carries with it supreme responsibility. The judgment of the Privy Council has created an acute constitutional crisis, and it is the responsibility of the people to decide the issue. Thus the final decision has automatically been referred to the highest tribunal in the land - the Sovereign People.

Let me make this plain. Without permitting it to detract from the dominating task of winning the war, people everywhere are looking forward to a new reconstructed democratic post-war order. What kind of new order will it be if a few financial corporations are in possession of the land and have our basic industry, agriculture, subjected to a condition of serdom?

Then again how can we hope to build a new democratic order, such as our citizens want, upon a constitution which places the claims of a few powerful corporations ahead of the civil and property rights of the people.

Thus, from whatever angle the matter is viewed, the crisis which has been created by the Privy Council's decision is bound up with the whole question of post-war reconstruction, and the future welfare of our nation. It is a constitutional crisis which the people alone can decide. If they are prepared to accept the interpretation of the law which renders them subservient to the financial powers, as representing their will, then the only kind of new order they can expect is the Slave State in which they will work for their financial overlords. If they want a democratic reconstructed post-war order which will give them security and freedom, then they must assert their democratic authority to that end.

I hope that will be plain to all our people and that, in carrying out their responsibility in the matter, they will let us know their wishes so that we can take the necessary action at the forthcoming session of the Legislative Assembly. This government exists to carry out the will of the people of Alberta, and we intend to do just that.

In the meantime the Privy Council's judgment places the responsibility for dealing with the immediate crisis fairly and squarely upon the Federal Government and Parliament. That government has been a party to the actions of the moneylending corporations in attacking Alberta's legislation and during the time that the present crisis has been developing it has refused to do anything in the matter.

Last year at a Conference held in Saskatoon, consisting of the Provincial Governments and the farm organizations of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, proposals for the adjustment of farm debts were unanimously adopted, and a strong request was made to Ottawa by the three governments for legislation to give effect to those proposals. In spite of repeated requests since that time, no action has been taken by Ottawa.

Another conference of the same organizations has been called to meet in Saskatoon on February 26 to review the whole situation and to consider what further action is to be taken.

In conclusion I wish to assure our farmers that the Alberta Government remains just as determined as ever to deal with this issue, but I must remind them that they likewise must carry out their responsibility, as I have already indicated.

WILLIAM ABERHART

PREMIER

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