

As a consequence, a prolonged strike, which, but for firm measures, might well have paralysed the industrial life of this country and wrought immeasurable injury to our people, has blighted the year 1951.

The view is firmly held by my Ministers that the success which had attended the policy of direct action pursued by the leaders of the waterside workers during the years 1940 to 1949 had created in their minds the idea that they were stronger than the Government. Experience during those years had led them to believe that militant tactics did pay. Encouraged by past successes, therefore, they embarked on a strike in defiance of the long-established and well-tried methods of conciliation and arbitration. Recognizing that this was a challenge to constitutional authority, and conscious of the responsibility it owes to the people, the Government therefore proclaimed a state of emergency under the Public Safety Conservation Act, and thus armed itself with the powers it deemed necessary to cope with all eventualities in a situation without precedent in the last thirty years or more. These emergency powers were challenged both inside and outside Parliament as an unwarranted invasion of individual liberties and an abuse of governmental authority.

Though firmly believing that, in the circumstances existing at the time, no more powers had been taken than were necessary to maintain law and order, to provide essential services and supplies to the people, to maintain industrial activity, and to afford adequate protection for all those who rallied to its aid, the Government nevertheless came to the conclusion that its proper constitutional course was to place itself in the hands of the electors and put its actions to the test of public opinion. On the advice of my Prime Minister, therefore, I dissolved Parliament on the 27th July last, and a general election was held on the first of this month.

My Ministers feel justified in taking the result of the election as a most emphatic endorsement of the firm stand taken by the Government in connection with the waterfront situation and of the methods adopted to meet the challenge to constitutional authority. They feel, moreover, that it demonstrates that the people will, when the occasion demands it, put the national welfare before all else and range themselves unmistakably on the side of law and order. The fact that so large a section of the organized trade-union movement stood solidly behind the Government in upholding the rule of law has also given my Ministers a great measure of satisfaction and encouragement.

It has, however, become clear to the Government that industrial legislation needs to be buttressed with provisions designed to ensure that responsible law-abiding working men, who represent the overwhelming majority of the labour force of this country, shall be protected against violence, intimidation, and vulgar insult on the part of a small but noisy minority who have, for too long, been undermining the best interests of the workers of this country. Legislation will therefore be introduced during the coming session to safeguard the foundation principles of conciliation and arbitration by providing for compulsory secret ballots on all strike issues and by making the practice known as picketing illegal. The Government believes that no one should be allowed to deny to others the right to earn their daily bread in whatever lawful occupation they choose to follow, without being the victims of abuse, intimidation, and threats (both open and anonymous) of physical violence to them or their families.

A disturbing manifestation has been the all-too-apparent similarity between the methods that were adopted in connection with the recent industrial hold-up and the methods long advocated in Communist philosophy. My Ministers are convinced that the strike, if not actually inspired, was actively supported and fomented by Communist organizations working with characteristic underground methods. The Government believes that public opinion strongly demands that