

The Address—Mr. Axworthy

The clear, underlying threat in the document before us in this debate is that this is a government that intends to govern for only part of the people—the powerful and the privileged. If you happen to be weak, this government has nothing to say to you.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Axworthy: There are some throw-away lines in the speech, Mr. Speaker. The government promises to study some of the problems of the aging. I think Parliament is turning into one big study session. For all their antagonism towards academics, the government seems to have a proclivity for getting back to the classroom. I suggest these studies are simply throw-aways. We do not need them. The real issue and the one they are not prepared to face is how to share economic costs and benefits among individuals and groups in this society. It is very clear from the throne speech that they are loading up the costs and limiting the benefits.

In his introduction the hon. member for Erie said that this is a government that wants to free people in order to enhance liberty. That was a high-sounding phrase but he forgot the other part of the corollary. He neglected to say that liberty also comes when you begin to knock down social and economic barriers, not build them up as has been done in the Speech from the Throne.

There are millions of people in this country who are forgotten people; they are ignored, neglected and even spurned. This government does not speak to them, Mr. Speaker; all it does is build the barriers higher and create deeper divisions.

As an example, I should like to refer to a cornerstone of their economic policy, the jewel of their proposals, the campaign springboard that swung them into victory. I refer to the mortgage credit plan. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Crosbie) has said that this will benefit 3,300,000 people and give them a stake in the country. He has said that it will stimulate jobs and bring wondrous benefits. I would ask him what program benefits the other 40 per cent of the people in this country who rent accommodation. They receive no direct benefits whatsoever under this plan. If I understood the minister, he defended the program by saying: "We did not promise them anything so why should we care about them?" In other words, the whole equation of the government is that they only care about those to whom a promise was given and everyone else can be forgotten.

When we examine the housing needs in this country, Mr. Speaker, we see that the full pressure of cost is spread across the whole spectrum of society and is felt more keenly by those who are renters. Let me give some examples for members opposite. How can members of Parliament from Edmonton go back there and tell renters they are being ignored when 41 per cent of the tenants and renters in Edmonton must pay over 30 per cent of their income for accommodation and only 15 per cent of the home owners are in the same situation? For the city of Winnipeg, 39 per cent of renters pay over 30 per cent of

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their income for accommodation while only 12 per cent of home owners do. Now I come to the city of Toronto; 25 per cent of Toronto renters pay over 30 per cent of their income for accommodation compared to 13 per cent of home owners. By that kind of logic, if you are really trying to serve those in need you try to assist those who are in the greatest need. Obviously something has been forgotten in this plan.

● (1450)

Let me now look at the position of the elderly in Canada. Sixty-five per cent of the elderly own their own homes but only 6 per cent of the elderly hold a mortgage on those homes.

An hon. Member: The tax credit will help.

Mr. Axworthy: The member opposite says the tax credit is going to help. It is \$67 next year. His government will be responsible for an oil price increase which will raise his heating bill by \$200 to \$300. That is not a very good trade, Mr. Speaker. That is what you call a Tory bargain—\$60 for \$300. If that is the way the pie will be cut, members over there will not be around very long.

We heard a lot about women in the throne speech. The problems of women are to be studied. But what about women who come under the mortgage credit plan? Does the government realize only 8.5 per cent of women in this country have homes with mortgages? The average income for women is only \$2,300 compared to an average for a male of close to \$13,000. With those figures none of them will be eligible for the full benefits of the mortgage plan.

What about the regions, Mr. Speaker? Is this a program that fits the regions equally? How can this consensus building be justified when it is found out that some provinces are treated far more unfairly than others? I want to see the first minister at his first conference explaining to the Premier of Quebec that while that province has 27 per cent of the population, only 18 per cent of the benefits are received under this great mortgage credit plan. The same thing holds true in the maritimes.

Perhaps we should talk about those who have the most serious need. I refer to the low income earners in society. For accommodation 51 per cent of senior citizens pay over 30 per cent of their income, 51 per cent of single parents pay over 30 per cent of their income, and 37 per cent of single and attached people pay over 30 per cent of their income. Those are the ones who are having trouble with housing costs.

It was not for lack of thinking. A cabinet document has been prepared by officials. They said "You can solve the problems. You can have a tax credit plan and a shelter allowance too for about the same cost". It was not for lack of proposals or prescriptions, it was for lack of commitment and lack of caring.

I have a proposal. The first minister was very kind to us all in the opposition. He said, "Come up with a good amendment; show us something that makes sense and we will accept it." I will give him something that makes sense. Let us include a