

● (1622)

The difference between the frustration of the Minister of Finance and that of hon. members on this side of the House is that the minister has the power to act. He is the head of the Department of Finance, and he is a minister in a government which has a duty to act. Granted, hon. members on this side of the House are frustrated, but we are not the government. If the minister cannot direct his department to get the bill drafted, he should move aside because we in the opposition will take the reins of government and get the job done.

The minister should not come before us with the feeble excuse that the government has been the government for only ten years and that we should not expect so much. For five years we almost had a new Bank Act. The minister seemed sincere and was almost believable when he said it was being drafted and that the bill was not quite complete. The minister told us that if it was drafted, he would table it immediately. He said he was just as frustrated as other hon. members.

I do not want to mislead the minister. On previous occasions I have pointed out that under the parliamentary system it is the right and responsibility of the government to govern absolutely. It is the job of the government to set fiscal and monetary policies. Regardless of the mess the government has made, I believe it is its responsibility and duty to set foreign policy, and to bring in legislation which gives direction to the country economically and in every other way. Those are the responsibilities of the government, but it is the responsibility of the opposition to criticize, to point out to the government where it has failed and to try to point it in the right direction. If hon. members on this side have attempted to do anything it has been to point the government in the right direction. My friend and an able parliamentarian, the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville, might want to push the government in the wrong direction, but I admire him for at least trying to offer some alternative to the government, however wrong and misguided it might be.

Hon. members on this side of the House are going to do our jobs. We will not simply accept the word of the Minister of Finance when he comes to this House year after year and says the bill is being drafted and that his department is working night and day. The minister is not saying the act is not drafted; he is saying that the government's act is not together. The minister does not know what he wants to do, or, if he does, he does not have the fortitude to put it in the form of legislation.

I cannot believe for a minute that the reason the legislation is not on the table is that the government is running out of time. The reason is that, characteristically, the government is confused. I see the hon. member for Lincoln (Mr. Andres) shaking his head as if to say no. He says the government is not confused. A government with a clear purpose would come to this House on a matter of critical importance to small businessmen and say that it knows exactly where it wants to take the country, but that is not the case here. If government policy was clear, we would have legislation. Perhaps the hon. member for Lincoln will stand in his place later today and tell us that

Bank Act

ten years of Trudeau Liberal administration is not enough time.

Mr. Andres: You have never had it so good.

Mr. Whiteway: The hon. member says we have never had it so good. Let us ask one million unemployed Canadians how good things are. Let us ask those in the secondary manufacturing industry, and small businessmen who are crying for venture capital and for a new Bank Act, how good things are. These people need tools which would allow them to get on with business. Let us ask Canadians faced with an 89 cent dollar how good things are. Let us ask housewives faced with 11 per cent inflation of food prices how good things are. There are 850,000 Canadian families which do not own their own homes.

Mr. Andres: Ask the farmers.

Mr. Whiteway: Perhaps the hon. member will stand in his place and tell us how great things are in Canada. We on this side of the House have a vision for this country. We want to put Canadians back to work. I hear hon. members opposite mumbling and grumbling that ours is the party of gloom and doom.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Right on.

Mr. Whiteway: The hon. member opposite says "right on" when one million Canadians are unemployed, when we have record inflation, when we have a devalued 89-cent dollar, when we have confusion in fiscal and monetary policies and when we have record spending and record deficits. If that is gloom and doom, then I am a prophet of gloom and doom. We talk about it, but the government opposite made it.

On the eve of a federal election we will point out to Canadians what they already know. If the results of the administration of this government are gloom and doom, so be it, but we on this side can do one thing hon. members opposite cannot do. We can offer Canadians a different course of action. We can offer not only different personnel, not only a new Prime Minister and not only a new Minister of Finance and new frontbenchers, but also a new direction, new hope, and new policies which will allow Canadians to see a star and to reach up and grasp it. We will offer Canadians job opportunities in order to get the country going again. What is the Liberal solution on February 28? It is, "We are sorry, but we have not had time in ten years to produce a new Bank Act". The government says the Department of Justice is not finished drafting it, but that just does not wash.

This Minister of Finance is being absolutely irresponsible. I have to chuckle at the hon. member for Lincoln. In spite of the critical conditions we have in Canada there are some members of this Trudeau government who can still joke and make light of the fact that one million are unemployed, that we have record deficits, record spending, waste and all the other things for which this government stands. The hon. member can laugh and joke about that. That is the arrogance that typifies this government, but it does not become it.

Mr. Murta: It is coldhearted.