

opposition, just to keep the proper balance in this chamber to which we have all grown so accustomed.

Honourable senators, I have heard many Throne Speeches in my day, as have many others in this chamber. Let me say there is nothing quite as certain or predictable as the standard reaction of most opposition parties and leaders to a Throne Speech. Their reaction is almost "Pavlovian"—words like "incomplete", "disappointing", "dismaying", "appalling", "lacks vision", "a great disappointment" are featured in their remarks. I wonder if anyone here can cite a time when any Leader of the Opposition said that he thought that a Throne Speech possessed merit. I cannot recall any such occasion. The fact is that a Speech from the Throne, in truth, is a general outline of the actions proposed by the government. In no way can it be a measure of the value of any government's programs.

It is unfair to condemn outright any Speech from the Throne, because all Throne Speeches are incomplete and necessarily lack detail, and so it was with the address delivered in this place by His Excellency the Governor General. By any standard, the Speech from the Throne was cautious, tentative, predictable and "garden variety"—like most other Throne Speeches, regardless of the political party in power. Action has been promised in a number of areas, but until we see the measures proposed and the specifics of those measures, it will be unfair to render any kind of final judgment. That kind of judgment will not come from me until the appropriate moment has arrived.

I would like to draw to the attention of the government, however, certain areas which will occupy a good deal of the official opposition's attention during question period and debate. With respect to economic policy, for example, we see inflation continuing to rise; interest rates are at record levels, and our dollar is under serious pressure. We in this chamber must devote attention to these and allied problems. Energy policy is another example. The government has failed to negotiate firm arrangements respecting oil prices. It rushes forward with the senseless destruction of one key instrument of a national energy policy, Petro-Canada.

There will be questions in the field of foreign policy. We will be asking for explanations. Canada has been seriously embarrassed by the bungling with respect to our embassy in Israel and by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, who has suggested that Canadian foreign aid will be dispensed to needy countries based upon the degree of politeness they exhibit towards Canada.

We will be asking questions on the matter of government re-organization and the government's rhetorical but little practised, in the view of some of us, respect for parliamentary institutions. There will be questions on the government's quest for privatization—the turning over of efficient and profitable governmental agencies to the private sector without parliamentary consultation and without regard for the economic and social impacts of that action.

[Senator Perrault.]

The government has talked in terms of its respect for Parliament. In connection with my responsibilities in opposition, I visited Britain a few weeks ago to discuss with representatives of political parties there the operation of Parliament when one party has a plurality in one chamber and the other party a majority in the other—a situation which Great Britain experienced for a number of years. In addition to the valuable research material I was able to obtain there, I noted with some interest that the Conservative government in Great Britain met within two weeks of the election, with a full Speech from the Throne, and weeks ago a program of legislation in the form of bills was advanced to implement the British Tory party's campaign promises—the pledges of the Thatcher government in Britain. In light of that kind of action, why was it necessary to delay the calling of our Parliament until the present time? If the problems confronting this nation were as urgent as we were told they were by the Tories during the course of the election campaign, why has it taken so long for the new Tory government to call Parliament into session? Now that we are meeting, we hear that a great many committees are going to be formed to discuss these "problems" further. It seems to me that here we have a government which is really not prepared to tackle the issues—a government swept into power by a wave of rhetoric, but not prepared to swing into action in the manner other governments appear to have done, such as the new Conservative government in Great Britain. Mrs. Thatcher was elected leader of her party in Britain at approximately the same time as was the leader of the Conservative Party in Canada. Why has it taken so long for Mr. Clark to get to work in Parliament on some of our Canadian problems? So we are going to ask many questions in the area of the operation of Parliament.

● (1550)

On the issue of federal-provincial relations the government's "affirmative" action to date has consisted entirely of stripping away federal authority and diluting the federal presence across Canada. Together with many Canadians of all political parties and of no political party, we are disturbed about this process. Those are some of the concerns felt on this side of the house. They serve to illustrate that we as an opposition have a serious job to do; we will do it constructively, but we will be relentless in our pursuit of answers and information in an effort to call this government to account. Our activities during the question period in the past two days indicate that we have come here to do serious business. Other senators will go into each of the areas I have just mentioned and many others in the course of this debate in the days to come.

One basis on which to assess a government is the degree to which it honours the commitments it makes during its campaign for election. After all, the people who voted for the new government did so on the basis of the number of promises made from coast to coast, on television, in the newspapers and in public forums. Last spring the Conservatives were full of promises. As they worked towards May 22 they were guided by the most recent public opinion polls. Whatever seemed popular they promised in their "lightning-rod" style of politics.