

Mr. Clark: Let me turn now to the throne speech debate. Some of the measures that were announced yesterday, and there were very few, are welcome. Most of those that are welcome, of course, mark a retreat by the government from its previous position, but we are getting used to that—they are the government of the pirouette, after all.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: As to the constitution, we are pleased that the government has abandoned its position that the distribution of powers should take second place to discussions of institution rights and that it has now adopted the position put forward by my colleague, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), by the opposition leader in the other place and by myself, that the question of distribution of powers must have at least equal priority. Obviously, the obligation is now upon the government to propose specific changes in power and I hope that there will be no artificial delay in carrying out that responsibility.

As the throne speech indicates, the government continues to wiggle and squirm on the question of the monarchy. The language, I think, is that it wants to make its position clear once again.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: It says it has no intention to change the role Her Majesty plays, but the draft bill, in a number of sections, proposes precisely changes in the role established for Her Majesty and the monarchy in this country. The government should stop trying to fool Canadians about its intentions regarding the monarchy. The throne speech says that the government is prepared to change the legal drafting. The question is whether the government will change its mind about making Her Majesty a sort of assistant governor general in this country. That is the question, and we require an answer to that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: With this matter, as with other matters, we will naturally await any specific legislation the government might have prepared to determine if the government in the throne speech means anything at all.

The government knows that it has my commitment, the commitment of my party, to approach positively and to assist in the improvement of any serious initiatives that it proposes, although naturally we are going to see the details of its proposals in legislative form before making any final decision. I refer to some of the mysterious references at the end of the Speech from the Throne to public access to government information and to "the review by parliament of evaluations by the government of major programs." That might refer to some species of a freedom of information law and it might refer to some species of a sunset law, but the language is alarming. First of all, they talk of "government information". Sir, it is public information.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Address—Mr. Clark

Mr. Clark: Until the government recognizes that fact, it will continue to be the most secretive government in the western world.

● (1512)

Any meaningful sunset law would not have parliament review the government's evaluation of what the government is doing. If it is meaningful, it will let parliament make its own evaluation of what the government is doing, and it will add to that evaluation the power to stop the program, if parliament thinks that program should be stopped.

The Speech from the Throne urges parliament to "approach our task with urgency", yet the government controls the agenda of the House of Commons. The Speech from the Throne was the opportunity to spell out that agenda and set that tone of urgency, yet there is nothing in the speech but words—no plan of action, no sense of urgency. One phrase in the speech of the hon. member for York South stands out. She spoke of burnt embers. Nothing better describes the government which has lost its force, its flame, and is simply clinging to the warmth of office.

This spring, when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) ran away from a general election, he said, "It is more important to work on the fundamental problems of the economy". But there is nothing in the Speech from the Throne to deal with those problems of the economy. The Minister of Finance does what he does best. He refuses to give us a firm budget date, and he refuses to tell parliament and Canadians all of the true facts about the revenue situation, the growth projections and the basis for those projections, so that the House of Commons can judge a budget if and when it comes in. The harsh fact is that while this government has occupied office for more than ten years now, it has not been acting as a government for at least ten months. In fact, the startling thing about the state of affairs in Canada right now is that the government has given up on governing and devotes all of its attention to preparing for an election which it cannot find the courage to call.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: I ask the House to consider the chaos in Canada in the last ten months. The Prime Minister started the year by calling a meeting of the premiers in February. Having called the premiers together, the Government of Canada had nothing to propose, literally nothing to propose. It ran a dog and pony show operated by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie), but had no concrete proposals to put before the premiers. Indeed, if it had not been for the initiatives proposed by the provincial governments, nothing at all would have come from that conference.

Then again the Minister of Finance bobbed and weaved through the spring and ran away from a budget. On March 17 he said, "I do not think it is useful to have a budget". Approximately 23 days later he brought a budget down, a budget which was so badly prepared it very nearly created a crisis in federal-provincial relations. The same minister keeps talking about growth rates which he cannot substantiate, while