

The Address—Mr. Clark

Canadians should participate in deciding who our friends are in the world and what our stance should be in the world. This government takes an opposite position. They have stopped that review. My colleague from Kingston and the Islands and others in this party will conduct that open public foreign policy review across this country so that even if the government shuts its ears to the views of Canadians as to what should be the foreign policy of Canada, there will be an opportunity in this Parliament for members, and flowing from this Parliament for Canadians, to speak their minds about who are the friends of Canada and what should be our foreign policy.

Naturally, Madam Speaker, there are some items in the Speech from the Throne, to the degree that we can find their detail, which we on this side of the House can commend and support. We look forward to seeing the detail of the proposal with relation to pensions coming forward. We understand the campaign commitment of the party opposite was to increase the pension of every eligible senior citizen in the country, and we look forward to that measure being realized. I can say that if the measure proposed does correspond with the promise that was made, we can certainly support that measure in this House and we will support it expeditiously. If the government sets a deadline of July 1 and is serious about it, then certainly they will get very real co-operation from this side of the House in achieving that goal.

There are some other proposals which we can support because in so many cases, at least on the basis of the details in the Speech from the Throne, they appear to be measures that carry through to conclusion policies which we ourselves began as a government. I will reserve my approval for the freedom of information bill until I have had a chance to see it in detail, because this Parliament and the people of Canada have been misled so often by the Liberal party on the question of freedom of information that we cannot approve a bill until we see it.

We would prefer to have brought back the bill which we introduced. In any event, we hope that the bill this government introduces will be a bill that is faithful to the two main principles of our legislation, principles which we regard as absolutely fundamental. First, that exceptions to the general rule that all information is public should be narrow and specific; and, secondly, that there can be recourse to an independent tribunal in cases of dispute between a minister and Parliament or the people of Canada.

I do not want to see the idea emerge in legislation that was mooted so often in the Liberal party, that there should be some right residing in a minister or a public servant to stand between the right of the people to information and the interest of the government in keeping that information private.

I assume, again subject to seeing the actual legislation, that a number of other specific initiatives mentioned in the Speech from the Throne carry forward work which was begun by our government. That list would appear to include a meat import law, legislation concerning the transport of dangerous goods, improved privacy legislation, better support for the handicapped and a comprehensive program to improve employment opportunities for women, starting with the public service itself.

● (1540)

I note that there are proposals for a policy paper and a conference on pensions. I should just say in passing, Madam Speaker, that I am a little alarmed that while our government took every step it could, starting with a committee investigation into interest rates, to make full use of Parliament, there is already the evidence that this government is deflecting away to other agencies questions and inquiries which should be carried on in Parliament. They will not let Parliament look into interest rates as our government let Parliament look into interest rates; they will not let Parliament look into pension policy as our government proposed to let Parliament look into pension policy. Instead, they are taking matters that should be the concern of Parliament and putting them up to other institutions.

We fear that what we are seeing again is a manifestation of the Prime Minister's old idea that members of the House of Commons are mere nobodies, with perhaps the refinement proposed by the new House leader that we are nobodies who should work only four days a week. We think we are somebodies; we think there is a role and a right for members of Parliament, and we believe that members of Parliament should work a full week and not goof off on Fridays!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: I also assume that the reference to an expanded community services employment program reflects the work that was begun by the former minister of employment and immigration.

There is one other major matter that I want to touch today, Madam Speaker. It concerns the fundamental unity and, indeed, the future of this unique nation. As we know, the government of Quebec has published a proposal for sovereignty-association, a proposal that is absolutely incompatible with the idea of federalism and, consequently, is absolutely unacceptable to members of this party and, I believe, of this Parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: I believe it essential that we take the opportunity to repeat that the concept of association is also unacceptable to the public of Canada outside the province of Quebec. That position has been made very clear by virtually every provincial premier, most recently by the Premier of Saskatchewan in an eloquent and forceful speech—that there should be no question at all in the minds of Quebecers that the rest of Canada is not interested in sovereignty-association.

The Premier of the province of Quebec announced today the date for the referendum as May 20. He is seeking support—

Mr. Duclos: Did he consult with you?

Mr. Clark: No, he did not consult with me; did he consult with you?