

The Address—Mr. Trudeau

that this government is deserving neither of the country's confidence nor its trust. I put it forward, aware of the critical condition of the Canadian economy and the personal crisis being faced by so many individual Canadians as a result of conditions in the country. It will be tragic for the people and tragic for the country generally if this Parliament were to maintain in office a government so lacking in conviction, proper attitude and credibility. We in this country need a government that stands for something. We do not need a government that has no mind of its own, a government apparently in full retreat from many of its own principles and beliefs, a government that has done nothing since October 30 but back and apologize. So, Sir, seconded by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) I move that the following be added to the address:

We respectfully affirm to Your Excellency that Your Excellency's advisers do not possess the confidence of this House.

[Translation]

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, first I wish to express my real pleasure at seeing you in the chair and that you accepted the urgent request of your colleagues of this House to preside over their debates. All of us take pleasure in expecting this session to be very tumultuous, and I think that everyone must be happy to see you in the Chair, Mr. Speaker. In the past, you have proved several times to be very qualified to preside over our debates.

I wish to say as well that one of the pleasures—and there were not many—brought to us by the election was to see the quality and competence of elected members. As for me, when I listened, last Friday to the mover and the seconder of the Address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, I was happy to see, as the leader of the Liberal party, that we had among us two young men, alike in various ways: both are married and fathers of two children, both have studied law, both have worked for the community as a whole, and for their riding in particular. As the leader of the Liberal party, I was very grateful to see that these two men had another common characteristic: both belong to a linguistic minority within the province where they come from, both have learned the two official languages well enough to be able to speak them eloquently and accurately. The hon. member for Nipissing (Mr. Blais) and the hon. member for Lachine (Mr. Blaker) have both reminded us by their presence in this House that we have in Canada many great figures, and that our country is lucky to welcome in its parliament people of this quality, who are ready to work in the interest of our country.

Mr. Speaker, at the outset of his remarks, the hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) saw fit to recall that I had undertaken the last election campaign by proposing to the Canadian voters a form of dialogue, a dialogue between the people and the candidates, a dialogue which would allow us to ask ourselves questions, to learn from one another what were our projects, our aspirations, our dreams, our successes and our failures, a dialogue on which I intended to meditate with my colleagues following the election in order to try and determine in a somewhat more accurate way the sort of

[Mr. Stanfield.]

Canada the Canadian people would like to see in the '70s and the sort of government it would like to be led by.

Several lessons must be drawn from the October 30 election, some of them pleasant, others less. I think it must be said in all humility that the first lesson to be learned as a government is that the population was not satisfied with our administration. It is a lesson we accepted in all due humility and which was followed by a second one, and I suggest to hon. members of the opposition—some of whom I hear grumble—that they also draw the same lesson with humility, that the Canadian population although it did not indicate great enthusiasm about our party indicated that it did not want any other party than ours to lead this country.

Mr. Speaker, it must be recognized that our party although it lost a great number of seats still has a plurality of seats in this parliament and obtained a plurality of votes in the last election. When I was listening to the speech of the Leader of the Opposition I could not help think that he felt rejected by the population. Twice, as the leader of his party, he offered himself as an alternative to the government. In two general elections, he came before the Canadian people to lead the destiny of the country, but on those two occasions, he was rejected. His entire speech was stamped with bad humour as a result of that double snub, but quite surprisingly, he attempted at length to explain that he was thrice annoyed, since in a large part of his speech, he took the members of the New Democratic Party to task for supporting us instead of him. He dwelt extensively in his speech on how he would have conducted the proceedings of this House had he not been effectively rejected by the people and the members of the New Democratic Party.

Now, we drew one conclusion: that we should accept the verdict of the electorate, form the government, correct the errors which, of course, we made in our administration and introduce to the House of Commons a program on which it would not, at the least at the start, deny us its confidence. That was our intention in the Speech from the Throne. That is my intention in making my remarks, this afternoon; which will be completed by those of the ministers and members who will speak during the debate on the Address in reply. That is what we started to do as early as on the day following the elections when we took administrative steps—of which I shall give a few examples later on—in an attempt to remedy some of the administrative errors we might have made.

[English]

There has been some criticism of this decision—criticism of the fact that we decided to form a government—not so much on constitutional grounds as for other reasons. I think there are so many precedents, and these are so clear, that the question was not really whether we had a right to form a government; the question asked by some constitutional experts was whether we did not have a duty to meet the House of Commons and to seek its confidence. I repeat, I have seen no serious proposition on constitutional grounds contesting the right of this government to stay in office and to meet the House of Commons. There have, however, been some political arguments put forward to deny us this right and I think these might be categorized in two ways.