

*Speech from the Throne*

Our fathers did not take exception to differences in fortune which were much more shocking than presently. The government did not think of establishing a just society as this would have been considered if not strange at least unattainable.

However, it must be recognized that a century ago the poor adjusted themselves to their condition more readily than currently. Times have changed and the political history of the last 50 years is that of a slow emergence of what we might call the social concept.

More and more all our governments have given priority to these questions and legislation passed within the last few years bears witness to that. But this is a complex area and the search for justice, by its very nature, is an ever-recurring and never-completed operation.

Of course we can see actual progress but this will never correspond, whatever we do, to total and final success. But in this field, as in many others, you need not hope to undertake and need not succeed to persevere. Allow me to refer to the Speech from the Throne which we are currently debating, and I quote:

In a period dominated by bigness, in an increasingly impersonal social system, one of the major challenges facing government is to remove the impression of isolation which so often surrounds men and women, depriving them of their sense of worth, of accomplishment, of fulfilment, and removing from them their identity as individuals.

This feeling of isolation, or to quote a fashionable expression widely used nowadays, of alienation is probably a new phenomenon. If we go back to the post-war years, when another liberal government laid the foundations of the social security program—one of the most comprehensive in the world—we enjoy today, we have the impression that our predecessors were sincerely convinced that a better distribution of wealth, while insuring that the underprivileged would be, as far as practicable, shielded from misery, would have simultaneously eradicated the deep root causes of social unrest.

But what is happening? We have noted that more than 25 years of relative peace and a quarter century of almost uninterrupted economic progress have not solved a great deal. We did not find it enough for us to guarantee to the economically weak the social benefits that would, at the same time, solve the problem of poverty. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the word "poor" is almost new in our political jargon. When I was first elected to this House in 1962, it was hardly uttered. Now almost everyone mentions it, which is an indication, I think, that we are now conscious of the fact that it is not enough for a country to tackle the problems of its poors, but that it should strive to redeem their human dignity.

This is the political trend of the present government. Urgent economic necessities related, for instance, to defending, in the public interest, the integrity of our currency and the comprehensive review of our fiscal policy, should not be construed as a sign, even temporary, of negligence toward our social calling but, on the contrary, as the implementation of measures to reach that goal. In this regard, long excerpts from the Speech from the Throne could be quoted.

New national parks, the fight against unemployment, a better economic climate, the maintenance of stable prices,

[Mr. Rochon.]

there are measures in which we must see as many aspects of a social policy, in its widest but also in its truest sense.

Mr. Speaker, the government was accused of encouraging unemployment in its fight against inflation. That accusation dishonours those who cast it. We may perhaps have achieved more success in the first instance than in the second. Price increases, in Canada, rank among the lowest recorded in the industrial countries of the world. This remarkable feat, for which the government should be congratulated, was of benefit to all citizens.

Inflation, Mr. Speaker, is a deeply rooted and demoralizing evil whose spreading effects spare no one. Unemployment is a more apparent scourge, more easily definable but surely terrible for its victims. However, experience has shown us that it is of a more temporary nature and that its effects are less protracted. We have already noted some improvement in that respect this winter in comparison with last winter and no doubt that through the economic incentive program which we have undertaken, it will be possible to lessen those effects, thanks especially to the new provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

I have spoken about the tax reform, the fight against inflation and unemployment but I could deal at length with many other aspects of the government's administration. It is not exaggerated to say that Canada has led the way by taking various steps to protect the environment. Ours is one of the few countries with a Department of the Environment specially vested with this responsibility. However, even before the department was set up, we had already taken a great many measures to protect the purity of air, water and soil, such as the Clean Air Act, the ban on DDT and phosphates, the Canada Water Act, all measures introduced by this government and reflecting this vitally social concern.

We implemented the Opportunities for Youth program. We instituted studies on drugs, the results of which are now taking concrete legislative form. We created Manpower Centres specially geared to students, etc. Although this aspect of the government's activities may have given rise to criticisms, on the whole we can claim real achievements. We have also taken many steps to protect farmers, to defend the interests of the consumer and to broaden Canadian international action.

In almost every case, I will point out, we have had to do without the support of the opposition, for adoption of legislation on the marketing of farm products, for fiscal reform and many other measures which were required in Canada.

I shall now stop my enumeration of the various beneficial measures passed and implemented by a government which has demonstrated more concern with serving the best interests of the nation than with ensuring its popularity. It is true that, the more courage we have shown, the more hostility we have incurred from both labour and business circles. The fact that so many private interests have felt aggrieved confirms our feeling that we have protected the public interest.

Apart from all such matters, the Speech from the Throne announces truly new legislation. One measure, for instance, concerning up-to-date and flexible competition will not please everybody, but will be of benefit to our