

The Address—Mr. S. Fleming

Mr. Speaker, no doubt we will hear a good deal more about the principles which will guide the selection and promotion of public servants in Canada and in crown corporations. I am confident, however, that what is being done is a very great step forward over what has been done. I am confident, too, that Canadians of all ethnic origins are anxious to make of our confederation a very prosperous and real nation. I ask all members of this house to remember that at a time when more steps are being made toward achieving our objectives we should respect the men and women who are working in good faith to improve the situation, and not make statements which will reflect upon that good faith. Policies and proposals advanced in a constructive spirit will have to be studied, and studied carefully, in an effort to achieve the goal of a single bilingual national state which we all seek.

Mr. Stuart Fleming (Okanagan-Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, my first words are to join with those who have preceded me in this debate in congratulations of the hon. members who moved and seconded the address in reply to the speech from the throne. For myself, I can be particularly sincere in that congratulation because in their speeches I found a greater realization of the needs and requirements of Canada at this moment than I found in the actual declaration of government policy itself. This is a time when I think it must be recognized—indeed, I think it cannot be avoided—that there is apprehension and doubt in Canada; that it is a time of unease and concern among Canadians; that it is a moment in our history when Canadians sense that the times are out of joint for them, when government is failing to lead, and when regionalism and factionalism, and now even the threat of terrorism, have inflicted themselves upon Canadian minds. This is a time when the national government of Canada has chosen virtually to abrogate its responsibility of leading the nation against these divisive forces.

What other judgment, Mr. Speaker, can we make of the government when we examine the speech from the throne; when this house is presented with what virtually amounts to a housekeeping document, to a preoccupation with the bits and pieces of government, with tidying up, with dusting the living room while the house is burning down? You can take if you wish, Mr. Speaker, a potentially major piece of legislation, such as the Canada pension plan, and say that this government has put forward a measure for the betterment of Canada, that the speech from the throne is not merely housekeeping or tidying up. But what is the point at this time in our history

[Mr. Francis.]

in the government providing for old age when we have no absolute assurance at this moment that we will see old age as Canadians. Unless the government gives the necessary leadership and confronts the real issues of the day, the issues which are dividing us so badly and threatening the very existence of Canada as a nation, how can we divert our attention to programs which will succeed only if every part of Canada—every province, every citizen—participates, and participates equally? There is something almost laughable, if it were not so tragic, in the government bringing forward programs which are called national programs, and there is presented to us in other places the spectacle of withdrawal of parts of the nation from participation in them.

My contention is that this house ought to be preoccupied at this time, and the government certainly ought to be preoccupied at this time, with an examination of why there is, as there so obviously is, and as any member of this house must know from correspondence which he receives, this sense of uneasiness, doubt and apprehension in the minds of the Canadian people. It is quite obvious that the Canadian people are seeking a strength of purpose in their government. They are seeking a renewed sense of Canadian destiny. They are seeking vision and leadership at the national level. They are looking for positive action in government. And above all, they are looking for a knowledge and an acknowledgement of the desires and aspirations of all Canadian citizens. These things we cannot find in the throne speech. It deals, as I have said before and will continue to repeat, with the tidying up and day to day management of affairs; the picking up of a piece of this and a piece of that left over from another time, endeavouring to construct from that something which the Canadian people can take confidence in and reassurance from.

I think we have only to go back to the time of the dominion-provincial conference last fall, when the premiers of the provinces and their advisers were in Ottawa, to observe all the elements of fractionalism revealing themselves all too clearly. We found, for instance, the premier of the province of British Columbia making four demands which virtually repudiated the position and authority of the federal government. We also observed that other regions were able to put forward requests and make demands which too amounted to a repudiation of the role of the central government. Yet did this administration at that time make any positive declaration which the people of Canada and the provinces of Canada could clearly understand as being the position and role of the federal government? Was there any clear declaration of what the