

*Speech from the Throne*

of its reliance on profit-oriented corporations to build communities. Direct public participation, either alone or in partnership with private enterprise, and over-all development planning are essential in the fight against regional disparities. These have been absent, and the result is not a program of regional development but a program of welfare to huge, wealthy corporations. This may be competence for the strong; for the weak it is waste and frustration.

• (1540)

I was going to deal with a number of other examples of what I believe to be incompetence. I shall skip two or three of them in order not to take too much advantage of the kindness of the House, but I do want to refer to two of them briefly. I ask the House to study the government's policy with regard to the native people. In 1968 the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development produced a new Indian policy with much beating of breast and loud fanfare. Today that policy is dead, as it deserves to be, because it was conceived in departmental isolation imposed from above and was rejected by the Indian people across the land. Where is the competence in this abortive exercise?

Finally, recall if you will the grain stabilization bill. Again, an important concept mutilated by thoughtlessness and incompetence. For years the farmers, particularly the grain farmers, have demanded a program that would give them adequate income security to protect them from the vagaries of weather, the international market and the international price. When at long last the government tried to give an answer to this age-long need to strengthen Canada's rural life, it produced a miserly and unacceptable plan, a plan which would have stabilized poverty. Our determination to prevent so callous a betrayal of the needs of farming Canadians, and the united opposition of almost all farm organizations as well as the three prairie provinces, caused the withdrawal of that bill.

The instances I have referred to—and I could refer to many others—are sufficient to disclose, in my view, a government which has been incompetent as well as indifferent, which has reacted to crisis rather than planning ahead of time, which has indulged in image and subterfuge rather than tackling with feeling and imagination the problems besetting the Canadian people.

Since I had the honour of being elected leader of my party last April I have travelled across Canada a great deal. Everywhere I saw the evidence of Trudeau's wasted years. I met with representatives of the poor at organizations like the Neighbourhood Centre in Halifax and the Inner City Project in Vancouver. They told me of their frustration and anger because the position of those they represented had hardly improved. They proudly outlined their organizations which had gained in strength and in their capacity and determination to demand redress against bureaucratic red tape, against the deprivation which haunts their families and the grudging subsistence on which they are forced to live. Many of them are developing agencies of self-help which could make an immense contribution to eventual elimination of the poverty culture in society. These agencies deserve our support and the New Democratic Party will fight to see that they get such support.

[Mr. Lewis.]

The sad, heartbreaking fact is that the number of poor has not decreased. One out of every five, and perhaps even one out of every four Canadians continue to live at or below the poverty line. The hopelessness, indeed the despair in the eyes and faces of young and old, white and native, child and mother, bring shame on a society as rich as Canada. Inequality and insecurity remain dominant characteristics of the human condition which our present economic and social values impose on people.

Many members on both sides of the House have visited Indian, Eskimo and Métis communities in all parts of this country. I challenge the Prime Minister, his colleagues and cohorts to defend the neglect seen everywhere; the 80 per cent and 90 per cent unemployment in many of these communities, the desperately shoddy homes we have provided for these people, the cruelty of an economic regime which robs people of their self-reliance, ignores their physical wants and threatens their cultural values.

I think of the elderly woman in British Columbia who had to battle for months before she was able to gain access to water without the difficulties from which she suffered. I think of the communities I visited at Pictou Landing in Nova Scotia, Moberly Lake in British Columbia, Fort McPherson in the Northwest Territories, and many others. Everywhere I heard cries for jobs, for an opportunity to develop their own answers to their needs and to obtain some security and some dignity in their lives.

Particularly am I often haunted by the cry of an intelligent young woman in an Eskimo community in the Northwest Territories. After a lengthy and factual presentation of her people's problems and grievances she suddenly paused and cried desperately, "Why am I talking to you? What is the use? We have talked to politicians and political leaders for years without result." These are conditions in Canada in 1972. They were there before 1968 but they are still there, still neglected and ignored, and this government continues to be responsible for that neglect.

True enough, one could walk through some streets in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax and see nothing but imposing new office buildings and high-rise apartment buildings and watch cars roll by and admire store windows full of attractive goods. These are a measure of the living standard reached by many in this country. They are a measure of a certain kind of progress and of the impact of technological advance. But I often question the meaning of this so-called progress and the direction which technological society is taking.

My party and I do not belittle the achievements of Canadians and the greatness of our country, particularly when compared with conditions in some other lands. It is not doom and gloom I am talking about. I am merely expressing a profound conviction that the Canadian people have the compassion to want ardently to remove this unnecessary human suffering, that they have the capacity to achieve this goal and that they have the collective wealth, skills and will to build a society based on equality without the hopelessness and indignity of poverty and alienation.

This, Sir, was the challenge that Canadians saw in 1967, this was the dream evoked by the innovations of Expo, and this is the vision which this government has lost,