

The Address—Mr. Stanfield

Quite properly the Prime Minister places great importance on constitutional reform. The continuing committee appointed at the federal-provincial conference of February last has not met since the conference. Officials have been meeting, but they have been meeting in private. I do not object to that in general. Yet those officials meet in absolute secrecy; absolute secrecy surrounds their deliberations and the country has no idea if any progress has been made, if any obstacles have been overcome or if any consensus has been reached. We do not even know what these officials are discussing. I think Canadians should be told what is going on. We all agree that national unity is a matter of the utmost priority. The Prime Minister may find that keeping the people completely in the dark for long periods of time is not going to help the cause of national unity and, indeed, may very well harm it.

• (3:40 p.m.)

The Prime Minister stated his views in Vancouver on the subject of certain priorities in connection with the constitution—language, the Supreme Court and the Senate. I must say I found it strange that in listing these priorities he should have made no mention of an amending formula for our constitution enabling us to repatriate it to Canada. Surely this is central to the question of constitutional reform. How would the Prime Minister propose to entrench a charter of individual rights? By going to Westminster for permission to amend the constitution? I am sure Canadians hope that when we are ready with reforms and amendments to our constitution we shall be able to achieve those reforms and those amendments here in Canada. Certainly Canadians want to repatriate the constitution. Certainly we want to work out our problems without interference from outside.

I agree with the Prime Minister in opposing outside interference in our affairs. There have been incidents recently involving alleged agents from foreign countries. Outside interference in our affairs is bitterly resented. When I first heard the Prime Minister mention this I thought he was referring to a new development. For example, I thought the activities of Mr. Rossillon were new in Canada. I was surprised to find they had been going on for years, back to 1964, for example, and I cannot but wonder why the people of Canada were not told about this before—told, for instance, of his activities in 1964. I wonder whether there are other foreign agents

[Mr. Stanfield.]

operating in our country about whom we have not been told.

The Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, is a failure in every respect. It could and should have been an inspiring document; it should have been a challenge to Canadians from their new government; it should have articulated a Canadian ideal. What we have is a let-down, a disappointment, especially to younger Canadians who thought only a few months ago they saw an exciting, dynamic and even uplifting new government. The Speech from the Throne contained in this flat, pedestrian document fails as an agenda for the new parliament. It fails even to recognize the problems facing the country. It could have listed on a page or two the backlog of business—taken two or three minutes for that purpose. We all know about that backlog; the whole country knew it. But the speech rambles on, resurrecting old items, distributing them through its pages, trying to join them up and trying to cover the nakedness of the “just society” which appears in it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: Let me quote just a few lines:

My government is deeply and irrevocably committed to the objectives of a just society and a prosperous economy in a peaceful world.

And in the same paragraph we find listed, among other matters, suggestions affecting national symbols and the financing of the Post Office Department as concrete proposals for the implementation of the just society.

The speech philosophizes about poverty and then leaps eagerly into what it calls “other and broader elements vital to a just society”. All of a sudden the former Bill C-186 has become an integral part of the just society. In the last parliament it was merely a controversial bill which sought to regulate the power struggle between rival unions. It has been said by its opponents that it would fragment national bargaining units and lead to serious disruptions in labour-management relations. Now, however, the government has clothed it in the garments of the just society, and I suppose it will be irresistible.

The poor man is to be emancipated as to his conduct in his bedroom. Perhaps he will be able to buy a ticket in a lottery; perhaps he will be afforded better protection if he runs foul of the law. Fine. I do not downgrade the importance of that kind of amendment to the law. But the same man may be living in wretched housing, perhaps without a job—