

the country that all its talk about pursuing a consensus has been just that, all talk, and part of a strategy of stalling. I say that this impression holds danger, not just for the interests of the government party, but dangers for the interests of order and confidence throughout our society.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: Let us go back to the throne speech at the opening of this thirtieth parliament on September 30, 1974. This was the language used by the government in the Speech from the Throne, and I quote:

There must be a greater awareness of the need for restraint by everyone in what each seeks to secure in incomes, profits, prices or taxes if inflation is to be mitigated. Demands to secure more than the economy can provide, or indeed for those who already have a respectable return to seek to benefit relatively from inflation, must be resisted, and the government believes it has a clear responsibility in this area. Just as no one group in society should benefit at the expense of others from inflation, so should no one group shoulder an unfair burden.

The government has therefore initiated a series of consultations with the principal groups in our society—business, professions, farmers, labour and provincial governments.

Then a bit further on it was stated:

The federal government believes that it has the responsibility of playing the leading role in bringing Canadians together to discuss their common problems and challenges and to develop proposals for their solution.

That was the government's position going into this session almost six months ago. Note that the government said it had already initiated some discussions. No results have been reported.

Then came the budget on November 18, and here is some of the inspiring rhetoric of the Minister of Finance on that occasion, and I quote him:

We have to find a better way of reconciling the competing interests of the various groups which make up our society. No group need lose in this search. Indeed, if we succeed, all can gain because the over-all performance of the economy will be enhanced by controlling inflation.

This is why we need a national consensus about what the various groups can safely take from the economy over the next few years. Co-operation must be the watchword. We will give leadership, but we will not try to impose solutions.

Again, as in the Speech from the Throne, the promise of leadership was made.

I am glad to see that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Cullen) is here tonight.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you.

An hon. Member: It's nice to see someone interested in finance over there.

Mr. Stanfield: It is about six months since the Speech from the Throne, almost four months since the budget, and no results have been reported in this consensus effort at all. There was a promise of some report of progress before Christmas. This was extended to the end of February, and it still floats in limbo, and the promise of leadership is exposed as nothing more than a gimmick in a game of stalling.

An hon. Member: All they can do is ski.

Canadian Economy

Mr. Stanfield: I have told the Minister of Finance at various stages of development since the House opened that I did not think a voluntary scheme of restraints would meet the need, but that I and my colleagues would support him in the effort to achieve one if only we could get some clarification as to what he had in mind and what he wanted. The minister has thanked me from time to time for my patience, and other sterling qualities.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: As time wore on my patience has worn out, and I have been compelled to ask the minister just how long he intends to lend his good name to a con job—because what else could this be? I still wonder why this minister is involved in it. When the minister expresses his concern, as he did again yesterday, about strikes and disruptions and the level of settlements, I have every reason to believe that he is sincere in expressing that concern. When he tells me that he would be on a better footing to proceed with initiatives to expand the economy if he had a restraint program in place, I take that as a sensible response to a question that I put to him.

Why then, why oh why, is this minister, who expresses these concerns, and supports that premise, simply going along with the gag of this stupid game of stall? The minister may say it is not a game. He may claim that the pursuit of consensus in the way it has been undertaken is on the up and up, and that it is simply taking a little longer than he thought it would. I would be prepared to take even this explanation, or an explanation like that seriously, if the minister would tell me on what ground he is pursuing this consensus. What is the nature of this consensus? Where is this leadership, in practical terms, with some proposal?

A couple of days ago the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Sharp) told me that the government had been given some assurances of co-operation, but no one in the government has any answer when asked, co-operation on what? One begins to wonder if we would be in exactly the same position as we are if the Prime Minister were overseas seeking a consensus and the Minister of Finance stayed back home pursuing a contractual link with the principal groups in our society.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: The way this government plays with words, it may have become mixed up as to who was supposed to be seeking what when the marching orders were translated into the government's third official language, to which it is now resorting. The Minister of Finance himself treated us to a textbook example in the course of his town hall meeting the other night. I presume he was reported correctly as saying, and I quote one of the more profound remarks of the twentieth century "Strikes provoke more unemployment." This is what the minister said. It bothers me that the minister may now have succumbed completely to this kind of lingo. He may have lost those of us who cannot write immortal prose. He may have lost us forever. I do not know. Next he may come along telling us that he is wrestling things to the ground after other things have begun to bite. This is like standing on