

The Address—Mrs. Vézina

Mr. Speaker, the economic statement of November 8 was adamant on the subject. If we pursue the economic policies of the previous Government, an already massive national debt could very well compromise this country's future. When we realize that nearly half the money borrowed by the Government must be used to service the national debt, we have a clear understanding of the challenge awaiting this Parliament.

Unlike our predecessors and Members of the New Democratic Party, we do not believe that the deficit can be left to grow ad infinitum and that extravagant spending will resolve our economic problems. The status quo must not and cannot be maintained. The mandate we received in September is sufficiently clear on that point.

Mr. Speaker, the Throne Speech and the economic statement have shown that unlike our predecessors, we have listened carefully to Canadians and responded to their concept of what a federal government ought to do. Canadians are fed up with short-term and short-sighted economic policies. They are sick and tired of seeing job creation funds used to renovate picnic tables instead of being invested in a long-term strategy for creating permanent jobs. They have had enough of watching the federal and provincial governments fighting needlessly over their respective jurisdictions. The demagoguery and the "divide-to-conquer" mentality shown by the previous government are no longer acceptable to the Canadian people.

Last September 4, Canadians indicated that they can no longer stand cynical and unilateral initiatives which are taken to score political points while the economic issues remain unsolved. They no longer want their taxes used to finance re-election campaigns. They are tired of seeing their opinions are not taken seriously and that the Liberals do not even consult them. They have had their fill of condescending policies.

Mr. Speaker, it stands to reason that we will have to make some decisions in the coming years. We will have to decide where Canada is going and what is the best way to get there. Once the government is committed to take the necessary steps to solve our economic problems, we will have to make sure that the men and women whose subsistence depends to a large extent on the generosity of the federal government are well protected.

That responsibility has been clearly acknowledged in the Speech from the Throne and in the economic statement, urging us to study the conflicts, maintain the dialogue and hold consultations before making major decisions.

[English]

I was surprised and saddened when I heard the response of the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Turner) to the Throne Speech. He saw our call for dialogue and consultation as a sign of weakness. Has he not learned? Have members of the Liberal Party not learned? Canadians will no longer tolerate having their views ignored.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Vézina: When decisions affecting the people are to be made, they want to be present at the discussion table, not out in the corridor. When programs are established which may affect their livelihood, they want to design them. Yet when calling for dialogue, consultation and co-operation, our efforts are denounced. If it is a political sin to have trust and faith in Canadians that they themselves know what is best for the country, we are truly lost.

● (1740)

[Translation]

So far, Mr. Speaker, I have been speaking to the House as member of a team which has been closely associated with the initiative taken by my colleagues the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) and the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret). I commend them for their courage.

By appointing me as Minister for External Relations last September 17, the Right Hon. the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) was giving me special responsibilities in the field of international development. He was asking me, and my colleague the Minister for International Trade (Mr. Kelleher), to devote all our energies to assist the Secretary of State in the management of the vital relationship linking Canada with the rest of the world. I assume those new responsibilities, anxious to draw inspiration from the professional experience I gained within organizations concerned with regional development.

Mr. Speaker, the generosity of Canadian men and women is such that, despite the current economic difficulties, they are quite sensitive to the predicament of people in less affluent countries. The government shares their concern, as evidenced by our decision to maintain a steady growth in public development assistance over the next ten years so that it will amount to 0.7 per cent of our GNP by 1995. A number of people are blaming the government for the flexibility it is demonstrating in deferring for five years the achievement of this level of assistance by Canada. I am sure that Canadians support the government's decision. As a former French Minister of Cooperation said so aptly, one must avoid introducing too much budgetary rigidity into the financial management of the State, otherwise the sum total of sectorial commitments precludes any national policy.

During the next few months, a special Parliamentary committee will thoroughly examine the major areas of our foreign policy. I would like to share with the House some preliminary comments on international development. The problems with which the so-called Third World nations are faced are extremely serious. I refer here to natural phenomena such as drought and desertification. I refer also to the bloody wars which are being fought in a number of regions and countries. I refer to the serious problem of indebtedness which prevents these nations from buying new equipment at a time when they badly need to increase their food production. I am also thinking about the population explosion, which is a source of major