

The Address

• (1240)

Does it set out a timetable and then reach agreement with the provinces on a monitoring agency so as to assure the Canadian people that real progress is being made?

In any event, is this commitment to an economic union—as welcome as it is and as belated as it is—compatible with political decentralization which the government has been talking about? Is it compatible with the continued federal regulations which act as an impediment to a true economic union in Canada?

One could go on. Obviously, the whole area of greater productivity and competitiveness is one that can also be studied to death. The government, in the Speech from the Throne, offers it to the Canadian people as if it were a new found land. What is astonishing is that it has taken the government so long to identify the need for Canadians to be competitive.

Education is clearly a major part of any such competitive initiative, yet the government offers nothing specific. It simply says: "More study, more commissions. Let's look at it. Let's consider it further. Maybe some time in the distant future, we will come back to you with more specific proposals."

Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you in all these instances and in others the Speech from the Throne fails to provide Canadian people with a clear policy or a clear indication of what this government intends to do in the time ahead.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I want to raise two questions with my colleague who has just given a rather insightful analysis of some of the problems that exist in the throne speech.

From my particular perspective, I believe that the Speech from the Throne ought to be a document of hope and one that inspires Canadians with a certain amount of confidence with regard to the problems that we now face.

I have two questions. The first one: Does he believe that Canadians who are dramatically affected in a negative kind of way by Canada's current economic situation have any reason for hope as a result from this Speech from the Throne? I am talking about Canada's almost 5 million poor, most of whom are women and many of whom are children.

As we speak today, there are 2 million Canadians who are on welfare, 1.8 million Canadians approximately who will be fed by food banks and 40 per cent of whom will be children during the next year, unemployed who number over 1.5 million and bankruptcies that have gone up by over 6,000 this month.

If one compares this with a year ago, the number is up over 50 per cent. Is there any hope for any of those Canadians who are among those groups?

My second question recognizes that the deficit is in excess of \$30 billion—in fact, it is \$30.5 billion—and it has been hovering at about that amount for the last several years and that the debt is almost \$400 billion today, it is an increase from almost \$168 billion in 1984? Should Canadians have any confidence in this particular Speech from the Throne?

Mr. MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the questions of my hon. colleague from St. Boniface.

He draws attention to the absence in this Speech from the Throne of any evidence that the government has found the resources or, indeed, the commitment to deal effectively and urgently with the real problems that confront the poor.

Many women and children remain in a state of destitution in a country of extraordinary affluence. You would look in vain to this Speech from the Throne for such initiatives to counter the poverty.

Would it not have been possible for this government to offer, since it seems so committed to studies, commissions and reports, an examination of our social policy programs? Should we, for example, be moving in Canada toward a system of a guaranteed annual income—or a negative income tax, if you prefer to call it that? Should we be examining the further potential of the tax system to provide those Canadians whom my hon. friend has rightly described as living in deprivation with the adequate resources they need to live in dignity and with the opportunity to provide more for themselves than they are able to do in the circumstances which the government has created?

Demand side economics stands back from the provision of those services in which Canadians can be equipped to help themselves. It is time that priority be given more to supply side economics where the govern-