

The Address—Mr. Lewis

Mr. Lewis: Gone is its complacent and reckless majority, and what we still have to find out is what has taken its place. Is the throne speech a genuine recognition of problems which had previously been ignored, or is it merely clever political window-dressing in order to hang on to office? At the very opening of my remarks I want to tell the government clearly and emphatically that if the throne speech is merely window-dressing, it will not hang on to office: we will bring it down to defeat if its legislative proposals fail to live up to the promises in the throne speech.

We in the New Democratic Party believe it is our responsibility, indeed that it is the responsibility of all members, to behave constructively in any parliament, particularly in a parliament with a minority government. We believe it is our responsibility to give parliament an opportunity to find out precisely what the government proposes. During his speech the Leader of the Opposition said he wanted the government to have that opportunity. I suggest to him that if he is berating us for deciding to give the government a chance to tell us what it intends to do, this is really inconsistent with much of what he said.

• (1750)

We believe we must give parliament an opportunity to solve at least some of the urgent problems facing our country and our people. I want to make clear, however, that it is not a blank cheque we offer the government. We in the New Democratic Party offer the government an opportunity to deliver. Ours is a c.o.d. policy; our votes can be collected only on delivery. Do not forget that. I want to make that very clear to hon. members on the treasury benches so there is no doubt about it.

In an attempt to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the government's conversion, the Speech from the Throne covers every area of national and international concern. I could almost see every ministry and every minister vying for space in the confessional.

Mr. Jamieson: I could not get in.

Mr. Lewis: The Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson) says he could not get in. It is therefore necessary, because of the array of subjects in the throne speech, to seek priorities for action by this parliament in this session. I say that the prime concern remains the unacceptable level of unemployment. The immeasurable costs of the ill-conceived and futile policy on inflation, initiated in the prideful early days of this government, are still with us. Only the pride has gone.

Although the Speech from the Throne contains a commitment to "expand job opportunities at a rate that will bring about as rapid as possible a decline in the numbers of unemployed," details are still lacking. They should be provided quickly, and I want to suggest action on a number of fronts.

Mr. Speaker, although it is only five minutes to six, since I am about to enter into a discussion which I would not like to have interrupted perhaps you would allow me to call it six o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Is it the wish of the House that we call it six o'clock?

[Mr. Alexander.]

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: It being six o'clock, I do now leave the chair.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. Before recognizing the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) may I point out that I know, from being present at the beginning of the hon. member's speech, that he intended to request the unanimous consent of the House to an extension of time. I wonder whether we could not settle this question immediately. I would ask hon. members whether there would be a disposition to allow the hon. member to go beyond his time.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and hon. members.

At six o'clock, Sir, I suggested that it was important for us to indicate some of the lines of action that this session ought to take in view of the absence of details in the throne speech. I want to say, first, that measures which were announced late last year should be strengthened even at this late date. In fact, I want to urge parliament to put the seasonal capital works program on a permanent footing so that it may be planned over the long term; thus, delays in getting it going every year may be avoided.

Every member of the House knows that municipal governments are chronically underfinanced and that the municipalities invariably have long shopping lists of capital projects and of services urgently needed. I underline that these are not temporary or short term, they are not make-work projects; they touch the basic needs of our people and they affect the quality of life of Canadians. I urge that at this session we undertake an imaginative and well planned program in this area. This would create employment to a progressively increasing extent.

Furthermore, I am confident that the provinces and municipalities will welcome more federal initiative so long as they retain the opportunity of developing and establishing their own local priorities.

[Translation]

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the budget expected this month or early in February must provide for an important tax reduction. Besides the maintenance of the 3 per cent tax cut provision which has expired, at least in principle and according to the letter of the Act, on December 31, we are also counting on a substantial tax decrease in favour of taxpayers in the lower or medium income brackets. In spite of the fancies which rove in the minds of some financial advisers in Ottawa, an increase in consumer demand will doubtless help create jobs. There is no excuse for not increasing consumer demand when, during the last couple of years, an unemployment level of 6 per cent or more has been experienced. In the present situa-