

*Speech from the Throne*

to shape their own destiny and their own future in accordance with our country's needs and capacities.

After years of discussion and a growing sense of Canadianism, after numerous studies and reports, this government was finally forced to undertake to develop a policy on what it apparently calls "domestic control of the national economic environment". On numerous occasions the Prime Minister has promised a statement of policy on this subject. In reply to proddings, he first promised it some time before Christmas. More recently he has been promising it some time before the resumption of the sittings of this House. Again, a little earlier this year he promised to make the statement immediately on the opening of the new session.

This morning, in reply to a question I posed to him, the Prime Minister said he would not announce the government's policy on foreign economic control until the supporting material becomes available and indeed until the legislation is ready. We know, Mr. Speaker, that will not likely be until April. The fact of the matter is that the material is not anywhere near ready; the government's hacks have been set to rewrite the document that was leaked last fall, and to water down the policy. What will emerge is a half measure. On the basis of information I have received, I am convinced that the government will limit the activities of the screening agency to only the biggest takeovers, ignoring smaller takeovers which might well in time have greater cumulative impact.

The Department of Trade and Commerce reported earlier this month that major foreign-owned corporations showed stronger growth than Canadian companies in the 1964-69 period. This means that foreign ownership is strong in the growth areas of our economy, so a relatively small takeover may, over the years, turn into a big intrusion in the economy of Canada.

The Prime Minister also said this morning that the announcement of policy on foreign economic control would wait for the introduction of legislation. What sort of delay this will produce is impossible to say. It may take five weeks or three months. I have seen estimates of that sort. I do not know how long it will take. I am far from convinced that this represents any real protection against a rush of takeovers in anticipation of the so-called screening agency. That threat existed from the moment it became known that the government intended to move in this direction. I call on the government now to take steps to prevent this happening, to prevent any other takeovers taking place before the legislation is passed by this House.

One simple expedient which I propose to the Prime Minister would be an announcement by him that the eventual legislation would be made retroactive to the date of his announcement of his foreign investment policy. In sum, the announcement is further delayed, the uncertainty continues and takeovers continue. Indeed, I cannot help wondering whether we are likely to get any policy before this Parliament is dissolved for the next election.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to another phase of the discussion about the government's performance. Recently the government, uncomfortable about its record, has begun to nurture a new myth. I have heard Liberals try to persuade the Canadian people—the Prime Minister himself has indulged in this—that even if the government

[Mr. Lewis.]

has not always been right it has at least been competent and strong. The role of the swinger is to be changed into the image of the strong man, the competent administrator. He has just shown us how he can do it. He played his role very well both in the House and outside. I have never doubted his acting ability. The record shows that this is just another myth. Strength there has been, perhaps, although unconcerned obstinacy would be a more appropriate description of the Prime Minister's and the government's attitude in many critical situations. But competence there has not been, unless one permits oneself to be dazzled by flow charts of bureaucratic rearrangements.

The fact is that the record shows that the words written by a mutual friend of the Prime Minister and myself, the poet Frank Scott, about the late William Lyon Mackenzie King, apply to this Prime Minister and his government—"Do nothing by halves which can be done by quarters". To me government competence must be measured by its contribution to human welfare, by its successful control of economic and social forces to this end. By this criterion, and indeed by any other, this government has shown dismal incompetence, leaping from crisis to crisis, full of excuses and threats rather than solutions. I will, as I said, before I sit down move a subamendment to indicate one such solution.

[Translation]

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, how one can consider competent a government which has purposely implemented an economic policy aimed at creating massive unemployment. Only those who scorn human considerations can do so and consider competent a government which has forced thousands of Canadians into unemployment. For instance, let us consider the unbelievable mess that still exists where the application of the new Unemployment Insurance Act is concerned, the situation of the thousands of unemployed who suffer as a result of inexcusable delays and who at times even have to depend on welfare until they receive their due.

The very nature of the present government and the cynicism of its leaders has come out in broad daylight for all to see in the way they treat the unemployed. Instead of being concerned about them, the Prime Minister was very proud of himself when he announced to the country, a year and a half ago, that he was willing to tolerate a 6 per cent rate of unemployment in his so-called fight against inflation. Unfortunately, his wishes have never ceased to be gratified these last 21 months. Then, the Prime Minister and his assistants became embarrassed and started to look for excuses. They talked about the large increase in the labour force; they claimed that the number of people on the labour market was exceptionally high and they expressed satisfaction at the increase in the number of jobs.

• (1530)

[English]

It is not enough that the Prime Minister used these excuses on previous occasions. He did so again in his speech today, boasting about the increase in the labour force and in jobs. Let me place some facts before the House by comparing two periods of Liberal government, the Pearson and the Trudeau periods, with respect to