

Speech from the Throne

There are many useful things to which the new Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs could turn his attention. One is to find ways of helping people on low fixed incomes and pensions to get enough food in order to keep themselves at a decent standard of nutrition. This is a real problem. I am by no means opposed to sending food to people in depressed and underdeveloped countries or to famine-ravaged countries, but I would put in a plea that the minister find some way of dealing with the undernourished, elderly people who fill the garrets and basements of our cities and have to exist on tea, toast and catfood in far too many cases.

• (2040)

An hon. Member: Come on!

Mrs. MacInnis: I am coming on, and I will not be turned off by that sort of remark. Our elderly people are existing on far, far less than is necessary for keeping body and soul together in a modern way, with a modern standard. Because they are elderly and defenceless, they are suffering.

• (2040)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I have pointed out some of the most serious problems our citizens are now facing. There are many others, I assure you, such as housing, manpower, day-care centres for the children of mothers working outside the home, the problems of pollution, of protection of the environment, of birth control. The complete list would be endless.

Those who have an adequate income can perhaps solve such problems or evade them. But individuals and families with low incomes or even medium incomes are trapped in poverty they cannot escape without this government's assistance.

I therefore suggest that neither the Prime Minister nor his government are entitled to look the other way or turn a deaf ear to the plight of those who are soliciting their support. It is all very well to speak of the deplorable conditions that exist in all the other countries of the world, but it is no excuse for not taking steps to improve the lot of the Canadian people. This government requested the right to formulate a policy for the well-being of all Canadian citizens. It was given that right. It must not now shirk its responsibility.

[*English*]

Today, Mr. Speaker, I have been outspoken in my criticism of the government's sins of omission. I can assure you that every bit of this criticism is based on the many personal interviews, telephone calls and letters that I have had with my constituents and many others across Canada during recent weeks and months. To me, there is something completely irrational and shameful about complacently boasting of our natural resources, our technology and our increasing gross national product, as well as our great exploits of the past few months, while at the same time we allow one Canadian in five to remain below the poverty level where he, and she, must watch his children caught in the same trap of poverty and be condemned, in turn, to rust and rot in idleness while the affluent con-

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

demn them as bums and loafers. It is all wrong and completely unnecessary.

But the price of changing it is one which this government is not prepared to pay. The price of change is to refuse resolutely to yield to pressures from the big business community, and legislate in the interests of the whole population. The government must give top priority to that part of the population which needs help most. This government refused to do that and still refuses to. Indeed, it goes out of its way to mention that it wants more co-operative and fruitful relations with the industrial community, as though that were the place where the need is greatest. For that reason, this government has forfeited its right to govern a democracy, no matter what fine phrases it uses to disguise the fact of its failure. I feel sure, and I hope I am correct, that the Canadian people have just about got to the end of their patience and their gullibility when it comes to being taken in by any combination of fine phrases, beautiful slogans, charisma, or any of those means used for diverting attention away from the fact that the government has not been meeting the people's needs through legislation and has no intention of doing so.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I say that the Canadian people have come slowly but surely to the opinion, held with certainty, that this government has forfeited its right to govern this democracy which we still have, thank goodness, in Canada.

Hon. H. A. Olson (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I wish to join the many members who have expressed congratulations to the mover and seconder of the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

An hon. Member: Why?

Mr. Olson: If I were to explain why, Mr. Speaker, it would probably take me most of my 40 minutes. They were both excellent speeches.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I thought the minister had only 30 minutes.

Mr. Olson: I suppose that the debate on the Speech from the Throne should be the time for us to review and outline the major thrusts for the future in the particular subject area we want to deal with. Of course, I want to talk about agriculture. Only a few days ago we finally put into effect the marketing legislation that the majority of the farmers of this country, through their representatives, have been asking for ever since I have been a member of this House, and even before that. That legislation is exactly what I said it would be and what the members on this side said it would be when we introduced Bill C-176. It is enabling legislation. It is on the statute books now, and the majority of producers of any farm commodity may use it if they wish. Neither this government nor, indeed, anyone associated with this party, intends to try to move this matter at a more rapid pace than the producers wish.

I know that farm organizations, and particularly commodity groups, have been anxious for some time to avail themselves of the provisions of this bill, and they are now in the position where they can set up modern marketing structures by using the legal structure that legislation provides. I wish to advise those members of the House