

The Address—Mr. Stanfield

Mr. Stanfield: But it cannot discharge this responsibility by keeping in office a government that has not only failed to respond to this human tragedy but, worse than that, has even failed to see the tragedy. I am sure that the hon. member for York South must recognize this as a crucial weakness in the government's posture as revealed in the Speech from the Throne. The government's first priority, as revealed by the Throne Speech, is to reduce unemployment, contain inflation and strengthen the economy—words which have a familiar ring. As we read on, only the gullible and the cynical could convince themselves that this government has either the competence or the creative capacity to do anything about this problem.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: Some months ago I said that our first priority is full employment, by which I mean a rate of unemployment of 4 per cent or less, not the 7 per cent which existed at that time and the well over 6 per cent which it still seems to be. I am interested in hearing from the Prime Minister what his objective is with respect to unemployment which the Speech from the Throne of course is very careful not to mention. When this government came to office there were about 375,000 Canadians out of work, and that is plenty. In the past year, the average has been some 560,000 Canadians out of work. During the recent campaign, before the votes were counted, spokesmen for the government were preparing the way for a campaign to convince Canadians that the present level of unemployment is an acceptable level and that all we need to do is to get used to it. One way of getting used to it, Sir, is to accept the cost to the taxpayer of financing that level of unemployment. I say that that rate of unemployment is unacceptable, the cost of it is unacceptable, and the government responsible for both the rate and the cost of unemployment is also unacceptable.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: The only way that the government can reduce the cost of unemployment sufficiently is to reduce the number of unemployed. The only way in which the number of unemployed can be reduced is for the government to identify its priorities and its objectives, and to place before the country a combination of policies, including an economic policy, a taxation policy and a social policy, designed to bring about the result we want.

In this clutch of rhetoric in the Speech from the Throne, we find no coherent program that offers either an assurance to this House or hope to the unemployed, and yet you can obviously see what is happening: the government is trying to put off its program on unemployment until the budget is presented. I say to my friends in the New Democratic Party and to other members of the House that on the basis of its record on economic policy, and of its record on unemployment, this government is not entitled to anybody in the House assuming that in some weeks' time it might produce in a budget something helpful and useful with regard to creating jobs in this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Stanfield.]

Mr. Stanfield: I say we are entitled to hear now what the government's program is to reduce unemployment. Apparently they cannot even make up their minds on so basic a consideration as to whether or not they intend to proceed with the 3 per cent additional levy on the Canadian taxpayer on personal income tax. The working men and women of this country begin this year with their wages and incomes further reduced by increases in their payments to support the unemployment insurance program, by increased prices and, as far as they now know, by increased personal income taxes. At the same time, the taxpayer, the farmer, the small businessman and the wage earning Canadian are confronted with a new tax form which they do not understand and which even high class chartered accountants find confusing. I doubt whether the government itself, including the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Stanbury), understands this form. This misunderstanding will lead to confusion and confusion will lead to chaos, unless and until the people are given a clear indication of what demands are to be made upon them in terms of taxation and at least until some considerable effort is made to assist the taxpayer. He needs to understand not only how much he has to pay but, with that form in front of him, how he is going to go about it.

Then we have the older people, our senior citizens, those who are retired and unable to work even if they wished to work, those who exist on old age security benefits. The throne speech indicates that legislation will be introduced on the subject as an immediate step. What legislation, Mr. Speaker, and when? Considering the record of this government over the past couple of years in this area, is anybody in the House going to give this government a vote of confidence without being told what it is the government intends to propose with regard to old age pensions?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stanfield: I hope I am not getting too much static from over there yet because we are only getting started.

Mr. Crouse: They are all bluster; they will not act.

Mr. Stanfield: Any good society, any compassionate people and any worthy parliament would not abandon or neglect these people. The cost of food in this country increased last year by almost 10 per cent and the cost of living has gone up by over 5 per cent. These same older people are now faced by the harsh realities of the Canadian winter. I think it is incumbent upon this parliament to determine where the government stands on this and what, if anything, the government is prepared to do.

• (1530)

We in this party, Mr. Speaker, made a commitment to the older people of this country. It was not a commitment to be honoured at some time in the future, at some distant date. It was not something to be done after prolonged study and analysis. It was not something to wait to do until after April 1. It was to be the first order of business in the next parliament of Canada, which ought to have been called in December, and this matter ought to have been dealt with in December.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!