

*The Address—Mr. Lewis*

in contact with people in Canada or across the world, heard a statement further from the truth or more convoluted than the Prime Minister's attempt to blame the New Democrats for the fact that Mr. Benson and the Liberal government scuttled their own white paper in 1971. One really does need some quality or other—I do not know how to describe it, but perhaps "gall" or "insensitivity" or a combination of those words might do—in order to make a statement of that kind.

I have a clear memory of the back benchers of the Liberal Party running all over Canada in 1971 apologizing for the white paper and telling the people to oppose it. Some of them are still sitting in this chamber. What did the Prime Minister himself have to say? Dealing with this white paper on taxation, trying to explain why his government scuttled it, he said in the course of a television program on December 28, 1971:

I concede your point, too, that it is likely we heard more from the vested interests than we did from the Liberal taxpayer who did not have the high-paid lawyers to speak for him . . . I suppose in participatory democracy there will always be someone whose voice is louder than others.

That was a true statement, but there was one important omission. The Prime Minister should have said, "It is likely we have heard and listened more to the voice of vested interests than to the voice of the taxpayer." This approach to the problems, described as seriously as the Prime Minister described them, baffles me. It baffles me when I hear him say, I am sure with sincerity, that his government does not believe the workingman should carry on his shoulders the burden of the fight against inflation. Those are not his actual words but that is roughly what he said. As I listened to those words I recalled what his majority government did in 1969 when it created massive unemployment in its fight against inflation. If that does not mean the workingman carrying the burden, I do not know what does.

I am happy to accept that the Prime Minister may have changed his mind and I am glad to admit that any person who is willing to change his mind and who is capable of changing it is a person who ought not to be attacked. But he ought not to speak in a way that suggests that never, as Prime Minister, has he tried to place the burden of fighting inflation on the workingman, because in fact no other government ever did this so heartlessly as did the Liberal majority government in those years.

I agree with both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) about the seriousness of events both national and international at the present time, and about the fact that we are meeting, in the second session of this parliament, at a time of crucial developments not only in this country but around the world. This is why I intend to try to deal with what I believe to be the contradictions and the dangers of our present system, which in my view are in major part responsible for the difficulties which face us.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I agree entirely with the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) who thinks that our difficulties, the difficulties of Canadians, the difficulties we face today do not result from war, shortages or famine.

[Mr. Lewis.]

Our problem—these are roughly the Prime Minister's words—is the problem of fair distribution of our tremendous wealth. I agree entirely on this.

• (1700)

[English]

Because I am in agreement with the Prime Minister's statement about what our problem is, I will try to deal with it in a way which my colleagues and I understand. The Leader of the Opposition said—again I cannot quote him, but these are roughly his words—one of the difficulties he finds is that the present government does not even begin to comprehend what is happening in Canada today. I agree with him in that, but my problem arises from the fact that the Conservative Party—and his speech showed this—fails to comprehend what the present situation is all about. In the competition of failure to understand, I am not at all sure that the Conservative Party does not win by a mile. In fact, in spite of all his speeches and statements, the Leader of the Opposition, as the Prime Minister pointed out, has not yet brought forward any such understanding or any program based on it.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, at the opening of this parliament in January 1973, the New Democratic Party decided to support the minority government in order to enable hon. members to fulfill the responsibilities given to them by their electors. We used our influence—I want to remind the Prime Minister of this—during the last session to have legislation and policies passed which we thought would benefit the Canadian people. And now, even those on my right who were eager to defeat the government a year ago claim for themselves the achievements of this Parliament because they know polls show that most Canadians applaud our decision, as well as the legislation which came from it. I think that given the success of the last session, hon. members of all parties must pursue the same efforts, that is to say they must run Parliament to produce constructive legislation and policies. We do not want to play politics as far as the Speech from the Throne is concerned. Our energies will rather be directed towards an evaluation of the bills resulting from the speech.

[English]

Having said that, let me emphasize that we want progressive action and a concerted effort to deal with the difficult problems facing every Canadian. I suggest that a failure to come to grips with these problems, even though the problems are not easily soluble, will mean a failure of this parliament and a failure of this country.

The task before all of us is certainly difficult, but that means in my mind that our determination must be correspondingly expanded to see that parliament does not fail the Canadian people. I suggest to you, sir, that history often produces moments which illuminate the conditions of a society more clearly than at any other time. I say this is one such occasion—and that it is such an occasion is graphically underlined by a Gallup poll published in several newspapers yesterday. The poll reported that almost half the Canadian people fear we are heading toward another depression despite the apparent affluence which now surrounds us.