



A Groundhog day Speech from the Throne: CUPE's analysis

On February 2nd, the Governor-General presented the Speech from the Throne and outlined the priorities of the Liberal government under Paul Martin. What happened? Did Paul Martin see his shadow? Is social justice just around the corner, or will there be 6 more years of corporate influence in our society? Here are a few points for discussion and action Canadians may want to consider.

1. Paul Martin wants Canadians to continue "living within our means". But we don't have a fair tax system and the corporations are not paying their share. After all, corporations just received the latest in a series of gifts from the Liberals - a \$4 billion tax cut on January 1st.
2. The Government claimed to support universal health care and the Canada Health Act, but made no mention of any of the positive recommendations of the Romanow Commission, including a national home care program, a pharmacare program, or no two-tier health-care.
3. The Government wants to advance the "Multilateral Framework for Early Learning and Childcare", but the framework does nothing to lay the groundwork for a pan-Canadian childcare program.
4. The Government promises employment equity for people with disabilities, but they have made similar promises for 12 years with little concrete action. The government also promises to give people with disabilities tax-cuts, but well-developed programs are needed to enable people to participate in the workforce if they choose. Responsive supports are needed to allow them to live lives of dignity, if they do not.
5. The Government will rebate the GST to municipalities, which gives them \$7 billion over 10 years to help meet their increasing responsibilities. This is a step forward, but municipalities across the country are facing an infrastructure deficit of \$60 billion that is growing at the rate of \$2B per year.
6. The government will support community development if it is an "entrepreneurial social movement" located in the voluntary sector or "social economy". This does not contribute to the building of publicly

- delivered, well-funded local community services. The years of cuts to the funding of social assistance and services have created a crisis in most provinces.
7. The Government intends to "...make Canada a global leader in commercialization of bright ideas." CUPE, and most Canadians, are opposed to a market-driven post-secondary education sector.
 8. The Liberals promise students that "loan limits will be increased, in recognition of the rising costs of education". This means the Government will increase student debt rather than reducing and eliminating tuition fees. They promise a grant program will only "cover a portion of the tuition cost of the first year of post-secondary education". This is a far cry from fully-funding post-secondary education.
 9. The Government laments the fact that participation by lower income families in the Registered Education Savings Plan "has been disappointingly low". So the Government will give low-income people an education bond. But social services for low-income people are reduced when they have assets. Low-income people, who must make incredible sacrifices to save in the first place, find themselves in a no-win situation. The Government puts the burden on low-income families to save money, instead of fully-funding public education and social services.
 10. CUPE members want a more independent role for Canada and a more just world. Yet, Paul Martin wants closer ties with George Bush whose security agenda presents such a great risk to the world economy. The Liberal government is working for "deeper integration" with the U.S. economic agenda which presents a great risk to our security. These are two sides of the same coin.
 11. The Government will focus on "refining and enhancing its programs to encourage skills upgrading, in concert with sector councils, unions and business." This discussion of labour market policy sounds very positive, but does not address the high level of unemployment in this country. Nor does it identify the contingent and precarious nature of many new jobs that employers have created as a problem to be solved.
 12. The Government affirms that "a professional, non-partisan public service-drawing on the talents and commitment of Canadians from every region-is a source of strength and advantage. Our public servants have an important role in this agenda of change. "This is certainly true, but, as our sisters and brothers in the Public Service Alliance of Canada have pointed

out, Paul Martin initiated a hiring freeze immediately upon taking office, and began an expenditure review without consultation with workers and their representatives.

In sum, we can see the shadow of privatization and corporate influence that follows Paul Martin everywhere he goes. Almost certainly he wants to ensure there will be a long, cold neo-liberal winter ahead of us. But CUPE will not be lulled into hibernation and will continue to work for the defeat of this government in the upcoming election!

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