

The Canadian Economy

● (5:50 p.m.)

When the hon. member came to the gut issue, the central part of her motion having to do with the redistribution of income, her proposition amounted to this: adopt a workable plan for a guaranteed annual income. We have all heard these clichés, we have heard these slogans, we have heard these suggestions from a variety of sources. The question to which we must address ourselves is: What is this workable plan and what, precisely, do we have in mind when we speak about redistributing income? The hon. lady embellished one cliché with another cliché. She talked about taxation according to ability. Where does that put her, or the party of which she is a member? I am sure there is no one sitting in this House who would not agree that people should be taxed according to their ability. What, precisely, does it mean?

Embellishing the second cliché with a third, and summing up the totality of her argument, she talked about using the resources of technology to deal with poverty. Again I express my disappointment. The hon. member is concerned about this question. She is as concerned about it as any member of this House, and has so demonstrated on many occasions. Today she added nothing to our knowledge of this question or of the possible solutions. I am sure this does not stem from a lack of good will on her part or from a lack of good faith, but it does underline the point that the hon. lady has been unable to advance our thinking on the subject. She has demonstrated the point made by my hon. friend from Thunder Bay (Mr. Penner) and my hon. friend from St. Boniface (Mr. Guay), that the whole subject is infinitely more complex than either she or other members of her party are prepared to admit.

I turn now to a conference which took place over the weekend, the Poor People's Conference, in order to make one or two observations about its importance as one of the new and more interesting developments which have emerged in the past two or three years. I have not yet seen the resolutions from the conference but I have read some of the press reports of the proceedings. What is perfectly clear is that in Canada today we are entering upon a new period of militancy. Supported by organization, a sense of purpose and a will to do something about conditions of poverty, the poor themselves are joining forces to do something about their situation. This represents an important change and in my view it is a most hopeful development, though it will not in itself put an end to poverty.

If there is any group in our society which can make hon. members of this chamber and legislatures across the country aware of the national dimension of poverty, the inadequacies of our welfare system and of our housing programs, it is the poor themselves. When the poor themselves organize militantly, strongly and determinedly we shall become more conscious of their needs, and the pressure to get away from the slogans and from the clichés in which we have all been indulging over the years will become so great as to be undeniable. At this point the measure of Parliament and of the legislatures will be taken.

[Mr. Faulkner.]

One of the things which has disturbed me most about the Poor People's Conference is that because these people are meeting in Toronto to upset the status quo, questions are raised suggesting that they are engaged in a movement which is, somehow, seditious. The questions were asked today: Who organized this group? What is their background? If I am wrong, I apologize in advance, but it appears to me that implicit in this sort of questioning is the suggestion that this is not an authentic Canadian organization of people who are concerned about the future of their country. Somehow, the suggestion is made, as it was in an editorial in the *Peterborough Examiner*, that this was a seditious conspiracy; look behind it and you will find the Communist party or some other sinister group.

Well, if the Communist party is behind this, it is to their credit, because they have recognized a problem and are ventilating it. I am tired of the implication that every time people in lower income groups get to their feet and raise questions about welfare or housing conditions, their patriotism and their integrity can be called into question. I am tired of the suggestion that the poor are being used by groups whose intentions are sinister, thus clouding the real issues.

I hope this conference has dispelled some of the myths prevalent in this country about the poor. One of the questions which is invariably asked whenever one talks about welfare is: Are these people really prepared to work; are they really prepared to contribute? As we have seen from the reports of this conference, this question was put squarely by the people themselves and is being answered positively. They say: Give us work and we will do it. The hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway told us there should be jobs for these people, that everyone in this country should have work to do. This is a noble position to take.

Mr. Peters: You mean there are some who do not support that proposition?

Mr. Faulkner: No one opposes that proposition, but the question to which we must address ourselves—and no enlightenment has come from members of the NDP—is this: How can substantially more employment be provided? Perhaps we should be talking about the prospect of full employment and whether it is realizable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order. The hour appointed for the consideration of private members' business having expired, I do now leave the chair, to resume same at 8 p.m.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

[Translation]

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.