

Government Orders

There is no better example of a nation that underwent an economic crisis by spending itself into oblivion than Spain itself, the great power of the early modern period.

Leadership of the Spanish government was dominated by out of control spending on the military, the bureaucracy, the church and the nobility. Today in Canada, the tax consuming interests find their equivalent in big government as well as transfer payments and subsidies to businesses whether they are private or crown corporations. Long after it became obvious that the Spanish economy was in trouble, Spain's leaders resisted every effort to cut costs.

Like many American and Canadian politicians today they could not believe that the money would ever run out. Each new setback to the economy was treated as an occasion to launch a brand new program. Taxes were tripled between the years 1556 and 1577. The great country of Spain descended into bankruptcy and has not really recovered.

Holland which escaped Spanish rule followed a similar pattern of decline. The historian Jan de Vries wrote:

Increased costs, particularly in the last third of the 17th century, robbed Dutch trade of its dynamism.

That observation should ring familiar as should another. I continue quoting:

And as so often happens in societies when new conditions threaten their leadership, an inflexibility permeated Dutch institutions.

As Holland went into decline, Great Britain ascended to global dominance. After two centuries at the pinnacle of the world economy this empire too went into decline. British leaders like the Spanish and Dutch before them responded to the crisis not by cutting costs but by proposing new expensive spending ideas. As a result taxes and spending increased dramatically.

As he watched his beloved country facing ruin, Winston Churchill observed:

I have watched this famous island descending incontinently, fecklessly, the stairway which leads to a dark gulf. It is a fine broad stairway at the beginning, but after a bit the carpet ends. A little further on there are our only flagstones, and a little further on still even these break beneath your feet.

After World War II the country that exceeded any other country in the world by any measurement rose to unprecedented heights in terms of economic and military might.

The superpower age was thrust upon the world with the United States leading the way. After almost half a century of unparalleled economic growth and world leadership, America now is showing symptoms of decline. These are high taxes, high prices, high budget deficits, a rapidly increasing crime rate, strong special interest groups, failures in motivation, a decline in education and everyday competence, a high tendency to import,

moral breakdown, loss of civic spirit and an increasing diversion of energies to non-productive pursuits.

Is Canada showing similar symptoms? The question begs the answer.

Thousands of people, business people and professionals, are putting forth their ideas to bring our financial house in order. Perhaps more important, there are millions of Canadians, ordinary people who get up each morning and go to their respective places of work. They are the people who carefully and prudently manage the affairs of their households and communities, who pay the bills, who pay to all levels of government. After all, there really is only one taxpayer. These Canadians in a growing tide are asking governments to take bold action.

● (1230)

My home province of Alberta is once again leading the way as it has done in the past. Alberta's provincial government, to its credit, has recognized the folly of uncontrolled spending and program proliferation. Alberta is taking action now. Yes, there is and there will continue to be some pain as adjustments are made. As expected the special interest groups are protesting. As Margaret Thatcher observed a few years ago, they have the usual socialist disease. They are running out of other people's money. However the majority of Albertans, the people who pay the bills, agree that excessive spending had to stop.

A new Parliament represents a golden opportunity to change the way things are done. Now is the time to act. We must prioritize spending to save our social programs.

I will close with this. For all the problems we face I believe this is the greatest country in the world, but let us keep it that way. By getting our spending under control, not only for our generation, but for our children and our children's children.

Ms. Maria Minna (Beaches—Woodbine): Mr. Speaker, I find the history lesson from the member opposite quite interesting. I must say that as a history lesson it is intriguing, but I do not see how the dying days of imperialistic England have had anything to do with the current modern economies, quite frankly. I think that imperialism was dying nonetheless because what people were saying was a whole other issue. The hon. member is comparing apples and oranges, with all due respect.

I quite often hear the members opposite talk constantly about giving money only to those in need. Who are they? Every time I read something or I hear the members of the Reform Party refer to that quite often I come away with the feeling that means giving alms to the poorest of the poor and forgetting the rest.

We have just heard a very eloquent presentation in this House from the member of the Bloc party just recently on the issues of