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I think the fact is that the minister, at the time he held the portfolio, had not really come to grips with the job. Because if he had, he would have wasted no time in ensuring, if he were going to ask for a second extension, that he had specific proposals and a specific date to lay before parliament for the introduction of the proposed Bank Act containing, as it should, the changes which this government plans to bring in. I am the last one to suggest that this action might have any bearing on the electoral prospects this year, but it seems to me that this matter transcends mere electoral prospects and that it is a duty which this government owes to the country. The minister should stand in his place at the conclusion of this debate, as he is entitled to do, and make a firm statement with respect to the timing of the introduction of the proposed legislation, so that Canadians involved in banking or in areas related to banking will be able to prepare themselves for this legislation and be given assistance and counsel in areas where they may be affected.

I simply wanted to make this brief intervention now because this legislation concerns people right across the country. People feel that the government has no sense of direction; it seems to be floundering, as has been demonstrated by the lack of confidence in our dollar in the international monetary market. It seems to be manifested in the way in which our economy is managed. The prospects seem to be very bleak. I do not say this out of a sense of pride or any glee. I say it with sorrow, because a country like Canada, which has so much to offer and so much potential, deserves leadership which this government is neither able nor capable of providing.

**Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in this third reading debate of this minor bill which has so little in it, merely a 12 months' hoist to the Bank Act which should have been presented to the House a long time ago.

In view of the fact that Canadians have always taken an interest in the banking system and that it was decided that it was in the best interests of the country to have a ten year review of the Bank Act, it is with a good deal of reservation that Canadians are looking at this bill and at the failure of the government to introduce a new Bank Act. Until this is done, the financial community is hamstrung and the economic well-being of this country is hampered. Not only are the very large banks uncertain but so are small credit unions which have considerable reservations with respect to this legislation.

I know from the letters I have been receiving that small credit unions, their managers and supporters, are following this debate with interest. A suspicion has arisen amongst credit union people that somehow the legislation is being stalled at the insistence of senior bank officers in order to hamper the growth of our credit unions and caisses populaires. Perhaps these suspicions are not altogether well founded. Certainly these institutions have greatly contributed to the economic life of this country over the years, particularly in rural communities. They view this delay with considerable alarm. They wonder if the government is deliberately stalling the revision of

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the Bank Act because they have legislation in store for credit unions which would not meet with acceptance from them. Certainly the public has a right to know before the election is called, and the government should not foist on them legislation with which they cannot live. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) should come clean with the House of Commons and with the public and give us an outline of the new Bank Act which, he says, is being drafted and which he cannot get back from the Department of Justice.

There is no doubt that we should have a new Bank Act and everyone knows that changes to it are needed, but what they will be it is difficult to know. Will they be so unpleasant that the voters will not like them? Of course, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has said that the government is a party of the radical centre. Just what does that mean? How radical is it? He said also, "We are a party of the radical middle". I have never heard of any people in the middle of the political spectrum being called radicals. Indeed, they do not do very much, and that is what this bill is all about. I think this short bill is merely a prescription to go on doing nothing.

Surely now is the time when the new Bank Act is necessary to give us a vision of the way ahead. The government even put out a glossy pamphlet a few months ago called, "The Way Ahead"; but in view of the delay of the Bank Act perhaps it should be called "The Way Behind".

It is a long time since the economy of this country has been more uncertain and there has been such a pessimistic outlook. In yesterday's issue of the *Globe and Mail* there was a survey by the Bank of Montreal which had polled 2,261 businesses which showed a generally uniform gloomy outlook. They thought there would be a continuing rise in consumer prices. It is interesting to note that some 60 per cent of the surveyed respondents felt that the devaluation of the Canadian dollar hurt their competitive position, while only 40 per cent believed that it had improved it. This shows mixed feelings about the devaluation of the dollar among those who should know best. Most thought that there would be no change in capital spending, and a large majority suggested that the federal government should cut back on spending. Certainly the necessity for the federal government to borrow \$200 million in our circumstances demonstrates the underlying weakness of our position in the world economy.

The Minister of Finance even suggested that he would go to the New York market in order to raise the foreign borrowing to support the dollar which he had announced last week. Certainly it is difficult to agree with the minister that the dollar is floating, at least cleanly, when we have committed such a large amount of our reserves to the so-called orderly flow. The other day the Minister of Finance said in Montreal that the recovery is gaining momentum. He said that in the third and fourth quarters of last year the long term growth rate has increased, but according to Statistics Canada, our activity was off markedly in the fourth quarter.

It is stated in the *Toronto Star* today that in 1977 the growth rate dropped to 2.6 per cent. Certainly this compares