

Summer Recess

they did not want to associate with that motion, they could have very easily stayed out of the House until four o'clock, at which time the Speaker would have called private members' hour and the matter would not have gone to a vote.

Instead, the Leader of the Opposition and his members voted against the motion to adjourn, knowing that they would have their out and they would be able to tell Canadians that their right to speak was choked off by a closure motion introduced by the government. Thus they were able to save their leader and to have their justification, but I say to hon. members opposite that in history and in due course the people of Canada will judge their actions of the last week.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. member for Cardigan (Mr. Campbell) on having delivered his maiden speech. I say to him that I understand why he dwelt so frequently on the term "Leader of the Opposition". Knowing him as I have from a previous political incarnation when he had many trials and tribulations in this particular position in Prince Edward Island, I would tell him that it has been my privilege and honour to have known all the members who have represented Cardigan since 1957. I know he will try to emulate the very high standard they have set, each and every one of them, over the years since 1957.

We are engaged in the final moments of a closure debate. There are a great many issues that those of us who have an opportunity to speak in the dying moments of this debate want to bring forward. I want to deal particularly with the latest news today which Canadians have had thrown to them in a dramatic fashion with regard to the cost of living. It is the highest cost of living the country has known since 1948. For anyone on the other side who doubts what those headlines mean, they mean trauma, suffering, and hardship for hundreds of thousands of Canadians across the country. This is what the headlines mean.

Last December 18, just as the House was to adjourn for the Christmas recess, Madam Speaker granted the right to hold an emergency debate in the chamber. What was the emergency at that time? I might recall to the House the words of Madam Speaker on that occasion. As reported at page 5888 of *Hansard* she said:

In this case both hon. members have drawn my attention to the juxtaposition of circumstances of rising interest rates, the rising cost of living index, the rising rate of inflation, and the decline in the dollar.

The hon. member for Oshawa pointed out, moreover, that because of the Christmas adjournment there will be no opportunity to debate any of these matters for a period of three weeks.

On that occasion in that debate member after member stressed the need for the government to respond to what was termed a very serious economic crisis. Central to the critical economic situation which existed at the time was the fact that the cost of living had risen 11.2 per cent, the highest level then since 1975, while interest rates stood at 17.36 per cent. Because the House would not be in session for a three-week

period, Madam Speaker felt that it was enough of an emergency to grant an extraordinary debate. Members felt there was enough of an emergency to demand immediate government action to ease the hardships which people were feeling from one coast to another. Mr. Speaker, compare the situation of last December 18 with what confronts Canadians today. If what we had in December was an emergency or crisis, then what exists today is nothing short of an economic disaster.

● (2320)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald: Yesterday the Bank of Canada interest rates were reported at 19.04 per cent, and today the increase in the cost of living index reached 12.8 per cent, the highest year over year rate since 1948. Last December's figures, which were considerably below those of today, triggered an emergency debate because the House would be recessed for three weeks. Today the Liberal government has moved to cut off debate and shut down Parliament for the next three months. It does that in the face of the figures with which we were presented yesterday and today. It has used the ultimate weapon of closure at a time when Canadians from coast to coast are asking for some measure of relief from the hardships which the government's ill-fated and ill-considered policies have induced. Obviously the government would much rather not hear about the difficulties which Canadians are facing.

No doubt cabinet ministers suffer from the delusion that if only they can get rid of members of Parliament and avoid their bothersome questions, if only they are not reminded that their policies are not working, then somehow all the country's problems would go away. Things just do not work that way, Mr. Speaker. The problems remain and, what is worse, they are becoming more deeply imbedded and ingrained in the country's economic psyche with every passing day. Shutting down Parliament will not resolve anything. The axe of closure is not able to chop away at the high cost of living.

I sometimes wonder, as I listen in frustration to the responses to questions which cabinet ministers provide, if they have any sense or any idea of how bad things are for a number of Canadians—not everyone, to be sure. I do not place everyone in that bracket. But for people who live on fixed incomes, or for those who are striving to break even—the working poor—the situation gets more desperate day by day. Therefore, I must ask, do not government members, Liberal backbenchers, ever hear from any of these people? Is that the reason they can ignore them? Indeed, is that the reason they can close up shop here in Ottawa and go home without responding to any of their problems? Earlier this evening the hon. member for Parkdale-High Park (Mr. Flis) had the effrontery to complain that he was being held hostage here because people were trying to deal with the problems of Canadians.

If government members do not hear from their constituents about the high cost of living and high interest rates, I do. I not only hear from my own constituents about what a mess the government is making of the economy, but I hear from people living in constituencies elsewhere in the country. I wish to read