

For the past 13½ hours we have been demonstrating the very deep concern which members on this side of the House feel about the state of our national economy. There is potential damage to our precarious economy as a result of neglect, irresponsible action and inaction on the part of the Liberal government which has wasted opportunities provided by some 20 or more years of power. If those opportunities had been seized for the benefit of the nation rather than for the benefit of that party there is absolutely no question that Canada would today not be beset by the ills we are experiencing.

I am very sorry more government members have not accepted the opportunity, the challenge and the responsibility to sit with us during this night because I think they might have found it a worthy experience. Having said that, I think it is only appropriate to acknowledge my appreciation of the presence of the hon. member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Evans) during the entire period of this debate on Canada's economy.

I must note at this point that it was this government which chose to make the constitutional resolution a priority of this Parliament, despite obvious evidence that the economic ills should have preoccupied us all. This is evidence once more which shows that the Liberal government under the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) puts its own objectives and goals before those objectives and goals that are primary to the welfare of the nation.

I was moved last night by the reasoned and calm appeal made to government members. They responded to that appeal by the hon. member for Edmonton South (Mr. Roche). I would hope that through all the emotion and bombast the considered reason which was presented, in so many speeches, demonstrated to government members in the House today, that they should make the effort to understand the background of our expressed anxiety.

● (0930)

It has been some year! We have the constitutional issue, the new budget, some hot political rhetoric and a country at odds. Alberta and Ottawa continue to hold centre stage, while in the background the federal government tries to keep the lid on the constitutional debate by muffling it with closure and other devices. While these are separate issues, they are all linked with the thread of energy, and there is no way of escaping this sticky problem. The most disturbing thing is not merely that we are seeing issues divide politicians but that politicians are dividing Canadians. There seems to be something tragic and demeaning about political strategies which are fuelled by regional differences and which thrive on internal turmoil.

Out of the whole batch of issues one of the most worrisome to us is federal energy policy. We do not believe this country is prepared for nationalization of the petroleum industry, and this fear has been expressed over and over again during the last 13 hours. We do not believe the country is prepared for the nationalization of the petroleum industry, yet that is the direction in which it appears Ottawa is driving us.

Instead of the various governments staging high stake poker games, the Canadian people would be better served by being

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told that the free lunch is over. Welfare waste must be cut, energy conservation must become a reality and meaningful steps need to be taken to shift spending from consumption to investment and development. We would like to see the federal government send out the message that if we are to protect our standard of living, we must increase production. Most important, we need to get our priorities straight. The ensuring of long-term industrial and regional benefits for Canada from energy-related projects should be our national priority. We can lessen our reliance on unstable energy sources. We can eliminate that reliance. It is time for policies and ideas with vision. It is time to turn adversity and despair into hope and opportunity. It is time to give rewards for effort a higher priority and to encourage small business restructuring and refinancing. It is time to deregulate where appropriate and to reduce the burden of the state on the economy.

It is time to face facts and realize that the day of cheap energy is over. A poll in British Columbia indicated that 49 per cent of the people in British Columbia want more provincial powers, 13 per cent want more federal power, 21 per cent want the status quo and 18 per cent do not know what they want. This preference in British Columbia does not mean a lack of commitment to Canada. On the contrary, it shows a commitment to a particular kind of Canada, which may not be that of the Prime Minister. Less than a year ago there was no talk of separation in western Canada. A compromise on energy policy was within reach. Rewriting the Canadian Constitution was simply not an issue. That was less than a year ago. What has happened? It is no accident that the relative calm of November, 1979, has been transformed a year later into hostility and bitterness. It results directly from a calculated assault by the Prime Minister and his close advisers upon the institutions and traditions of Canada. Canada is to be changed. It is Ottawa, not the provinces, which has raised the national debt to \$105 billion. It is Ottawa which has overspent to the point that one-fifth of federal expenditures goes to pay interest on the debt.

It is Ottawa which has led Canada into a dream world where no one needs to work if he does not want to do so and where the state will take care of everything. The budget, the national energy program and the proposed new constitution are all linked together. Canada is to continue in the socialist mould, with power increasingly concentrated in Ottawa. Effort will continue to be diverted from wealth creation to wealth redistribution, and I want to underline that. This is the danger we face today. It is a most ominous danger. That is why Ottawa demands more revenue from oil and gas, to bail itself out of its condition of undeclared bankruptcy.

What is it which has caused the disaffection in British Columbia and the west? I believe it is the realization that policies originating in Ottawa under the Liberal government—this appalling disaster which has beset Canada—have one purpose and one purpose only, and that is to attract the support of the largest block of voters in Canada. It is exclusively to attract the votes of central Canada. Where is the national interest? The national interest never has a chance