

Excise Tax Act

prepared to share the glory of having come up with a good idea. In fact, we will even allow the Government to adopt the idea as its own!

In a more serious vein, I want to suggest to the Government that there is not a study anywhere which would indicate that it is better for the economy of Canada to increase the federal sales tax by the numbers and amounts that this Bill will, over and against the option of reducing the handouts and tax concessions which are presently available to the corporate sector by one-quarter, thereby raising the same amount of money. That would trim off some of the fat.

If the Minister really wants to do something useful, she should accept this proposal in the way that it is intended. The Conservative Party was right when it was in opposition to say that these were the wrong measures and it was the wrong way to go. The Conservative Party argued a very forceful case when it was in opposition. Reluctant though I am at times to agree, I agreed with what was put forward by the Tory Party when it sat on this side of the House. Having already made that great leap and accepted that it was right when it was over here, I can come to no other conclusion but that it must be wrong when it is over there. It is not possible to be otherwise. If I supported it when it was arguing that this was the wrong way to go—and I did—then I can do no other than to be consistent and say; “Why don’t you join me in the consistency and live up to what you believed was true?” Then it could look at alternative ways.

I am not suggesting that what we proposed as appropriate measures are necessarily the only measures which could be implemented. But I am suggesting that there is widespread support in the House of Commons—and I think on the backbenches of the Government and out in the country among the experts and analysts—for a very careful review of the concession method of providing a pass-through of tax dollars to the corporate sector. Since there is no requirement on the corporate sector to live up to any kind of guidelines or to abide by any kind of commitments, it is abundantly clear to anyone who has studied this subject that there are few, if any, benefits that flow from the \$18 billion, or at least a significant portion of that amount; but if the Government is determined to reduce the amounts it would not cause any long-term damage to the economy of Canada. There certainly are few benefits in what is being proposed here today.

We need only look around the country to appreciate that we are facing as difficult a time today as we were facing prior to the Government being elected. The unemployment statistics show quite clearly that, with all the best intentions in the world, the Government is not able to match its commitments to its performance. Indeed, in the first three months of the Government’s mandate things have worsened for many people. There are now 50,000 more people looking for work than there were when the Government was elected. There are 244,000 people in Canada who have been unemployed for between six months and a year, many of whom no longer qualify for unemployment benefits. There are 130,000 people who have been unemployed for over a year. Long-term unemployment in

Canada—those unemployed for a year or more—is considerably higher now than it was a year ago. In fact, it has risen by approximately 180 per cent. Those people are not going to be satisfied with the measures which have been brought forward to date.

The Government speaks of confidence, but confidence is difficult to measure. The Prime Minister admitted that it is hard to measure confidence; it is hard to feed it into the equation and calculate how it will impact. I agree that it is hard. I honestly hope that the Government’s measures work, and I will tell the House why I hope they work. I hope they work because if they do not work the country will be in an awful mess. The measures which have been taken since September 4 will work a tremendous hardship on a large number of people. Between now and the end of next year, those measures are anticipated to create between 50,000 and 100,000 more people on the unemployment rolls. I would hate to think that that additional sacrifice will be made by those individuals, among others, and then have the Government’s long-term program not work.

● (1430)

What I find most difficult is: What does confidence mean? It is a wonderful word but how can one measure it? How can one measure confidence when one has no job and no one in the area is hiring? How does one measure confidence when a kid graduates from high school and has no way of being able to continue on to university? How does one measure confidence when a person owns a home but because of cut-backs he cannot afford to meet the mortgage payments and must give it up? How does one measure confidence when a small business person operating in a small community finds that the only employer in that community is closing his door? What does one say to the people who worked for that employer who is closing his door? The word “confidence” is a wonderful word. We can say we are as confident as hell, but having said it, what about the jobs? What about the employment opportunities and the growth? Where do we see the development taking place which would lead us to believe that in fact there is something which will flow from that development? It is bad enough that the Government of the day should inherit a terrible situation, but far worse that the Government of the day should then set about to make it even more so. That is what is happening not only as a result of this measure but as well as a result of the economic statement which was brought forward by the Minister of Finance some weeks ago.

One cannot create employment by creating unemployment. We cannot decide to cut back a whole host of programs with the inevitable consequence that there will be more people unemployed, and then expect that everyone will feel that somehow or other that measure is creating employment. It just does not happen.

I want to say to the Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, that we have to stop and take a look at the reality of that which is Canada. We have gone through some very buoyant economic times and we have gone through some less satisfacto-