

*Economic Policy*

Canadian people in order to protect jobs, while at the same time creating new jobs. And that was not done, but I was shocked this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, when I heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald) who had the gall to say: I think we are heading in the right direction. In spite of all our problems we have to face, we do seem to be on the right track. And the Minister of Finance in the last few years had all the time required to review carefully the measures he could have introduced, and he had the gall to claim he was on the right track, with nearly one million unemployed.

Hon. members will agree that today offers a good opportunity to deal with that problem and that we cannot help urging the government to find a new approach. Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I asked a question of the Prime Minister, a very objective question in which I stated that the government leadership has been woefully inadequate. Besides that considering the rising unemployment rate, the most dramatic plague that we have in Canada, I was referring to the announcement made by the Minister of Finance who is to introduce his budget and I wondered if it would not be appropriate to call a meeting of all sectors of the economy to help the government. I feel it was a realistic suggestion.

Of course members on both sides of the House want to find some solutions and I believe that the government has demonstrated in recent years that it had none. We should gather around the same table all sectors of the economy which might help the government. That is all we are asking, Mr. Speaker, that all those who could be invited, starting with the Economic Council of Canada—I think there are a number of important qualified economists—that the unions, the provinces be invited to a round table, but before the budget is tabled, to help the Minister of Finance define options for the future and allow him to see to it that his funds are spent efficiently in the short and the long run. I think that a meeting is needed on an urgent basis when we consider that the government has nothing else to answer but that there are countries which are worse off than ours.

We cannot be satisfied with answers like that from the government, and I deeply regret that the Prime Minister turned down that immediate, urgent meeting of those parties interested in improving the situation who would, I am sure, cooperate with the government in the interest of those living in Canada, and we would applaud such a conference if that made it possible to correct the current situation.

Mr. Speaker, while deploring the fact that the Prime Minister refused to call such a conference, I would also like to say here that while the government may try to justify its position, nevertheless it was warned, and I think that it is important that the members of this House and Canadians be made well aware. This afternoon the leader of our party gave serious figures, pointed to the alarming situation and called for urgent action from the government. I think that Canadians are behind him in that respect, there is something to be done, something must be done.

What is inconceivable and unforgivable is that this government was warned. Indeed I would like to pay tribute to the

[Mr. La Salle.]

hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield), the former leader of this party, who for the past five or six years warned the government repeatedly about the situation that would exist if this government continued to administer the country as it was doing and as it is still doing. No, no, they preferred, of course, to politicize the arguments or the suggestions put forward by the hon. member for Halifax.

They certainly succeeded in ridiculing him during the 1974 campaign about one of his proposals that the government did not hesitate to use. They succeeded in making most Canadians believe that the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield) was wrong, but today all Canadians recognize that his predictions were right. Unfortunately they did not listen to the hon. member for Halifax and we are now in an almost catastrophic situation. However, when we condemn this government, we are accused of lacking objectivity.

I think that Canadians are only waiting for the opportunity to treat the government as it deserves and to remind it that it failed to meet its basic objectives, its commitments and its appeals to the people. We recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the most important economic levers to deal with that situation are in the hands of the federal government, and the provinces admit it too.

Last week the premier of Quebec admitted in the provincial legislature that according to recent statistics, the economic levers were in the hands of the federal government and that the laissez-faire of this government was an important factor in the present situation. But on the other side of this House they like to ridicule—I deplore it and we all do—the statements from the provinces. I think we should understand and recognize the importance of provincial participation before such serious difficulties and problems.

It is also very obvious that the present government did not find and does not seem to be able to offer solutions to deal with that situation. I think the provinces are interested in participating in national decisions of that scope on a problem as crucial as the present situation.

In the last ten years this government, as was stated this afternoon and it will never be repeated enough, has shown an attitude of confrontation towards the provinces and an attitude of unilateral decisions. Today we ask ourselves why so many Canadians—and I am not saying so many Quebecers—wonder seriously about the future of federalism, not about the formula of a normal federalism, but about the federalism formula applied by this government. It is not federalism as such which is at fault, it is in its present implementation that federalism is basically at fault.

Mr. Speaker, we can talk about national unity, but it will never be possible to have a united country in unfavourable economic circumstances. Therefore, the economic factor is of vital importance. But in view of the problems that we are now facing, the economic situation is not very encouraging. Yet, some would like to make Canadians throughout the country believe that national unity depends on the decisions of a single man, the right hon. Prime Minister of Canada. For my part, I have serious reservations when one man suggests that he owns