

the government, "they seem to be working so far as the Gallup poll is concerned, so we will adopt them."

It is one thing for us to sit here in the social democratic corner and wince. But, Mr. Speaker, if there are any true Liberals in this country they must be crying today when they see the kind of estimates that have been tabled in this House. They are irresponsible in the extreme. This government—any government—has the responsibility to lead, not to knuckle under to the hysteria created by an irresponsible opposition which is sitting opposite and grinding its own axe. In tabling its estimates the government is behaving in the way that is usually attributed to generals—it is fighting the battles of the past instead of looking at the problems of today.

The government's estimates reflect an economic ignorance matched only by a blind disregard for the crisis of unemployment. The estimates that we see today would have been more appropriate for an economy that was bursting at the seams. If the government had brought these estimates in four years ago, there might have been some sense to them. But to bring in this kind of restraint at a time when there are one million unemployed in this country, and when the major objective of the government, indeed of any government, is to put these people back to work, is criminal.

It is senseless in another way, Mr. Speaker, and let me give a number of examples of the kind of senselessness that we are being asked to accept. On the one hand the government is holding down its manpower requirements in the coming year to virtually zero. Then it turns around and brings in a program called Canada Works, designed to create jobs elsewhere in the public sector which are going to be more costly and less effective. We have people coming out of universities who are looking for jobs, yet the government is going to bring down the guillotine on jobs. The government is compounding the unemployment problem.

The government's position for a long time now, aided and supported by the official opposition, has been that it has to get out of the economy. It has to get out of stimulating the economy and let the private sector in. To some extent, if that were going to work, it would be understandable. But instead the government is getting out of the economy, the private sector is getting out of the economy, and no one is getting into the economy. Under those circumstances even the most free enterprising of governments—for example, the United States—should recognize that there is a heavy responsibility on government to provide employment if the private sector has failed to do so. And the private sector has failed to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Some 83 per cent of our plant capacity is being used. There is an enormous gap in confidence, and lack of stimulation. Instead of the government stepping into the breach, even a private enterprise government, and saying, "All right, we have to supplement what is going on in the private sector", and instead of stimulating the economy, the government is walking away from its responsibility. It is the R. B. Bennett of the depression days; it is the Hoovers all over again, talking about balancing budgets when in fact the government should be

creating employment. In my view, it is a most irresponsible thing for the government to do.

● (1550)

To take another example, the government is holding its capital expenditures, the amount of money it spends on capital works, to about the same level as it has over the previous years, this at a time when the private sector is not engaged, when we have one of the highest levels of unemployment in the construction industry which this country has seen, when we need houses, when we need sewage disposal plants, and when we need to upgrade insulation in public and private residences in view of the higher cost of energy. At this time the government is opting out. When is the government going to do all that?

Public transportation should be improved. When will the government do it? Will it wait for full employment and then decide to stimulate the economy and create inflation? Or perhaps it figures we will never have full employment. If it continues in the direction in which it is going now, we will never have full employment or anything approaching it.

I gave the government credit—perhaps I should not have—for having a little more sense than it has, but it does not seem to have any at all. It is one thing for ministers to take the heat off themselves, as apparently they have done, but I found the Conservative party's response to the government measures was awkward. The Conservatives were finding it difficult to criticize the proposals which the government introduced. If it was the government's objective to neutralize the Conservative opposition, it has achieved it. In the criticism levelled against the government's estimates, the official opposition stopped criticizing the contents of the estimates and reverted back to saying they do not like the form in which they were introduced. That is the most biting criticism they could mount on the estimates. That is the kind of thing that has been put forward to the House.

I think that the government's behaviour at a time of enormous unemployment in the country is absolutely disgraceful.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Saltsman: A reduction in government expenditures may be a virtue under certain circumstances, but in the light of the one million unemployed in this country, the government's conduct is callous, misguided, and is boot-licking the rich in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) for providing on time, to me and my colleagues, the French background information on the main estimates for the financial year 1977-78.

These estimates amount to some \$45.1 billion for financial year 1977-78 and show a real increase of \$3 billion over financial year 1976-77. I would like to make an immediate reference to the *Reader's Digest* of January 1977, page 80,