

crisis which affects Canadians wherever they live. Finally, it is time the Government of Canada showed some concern for the people of Canada.

● (2030)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we are meeting in emergency debate tonight, a week before Christmas, in a season which is usually, and should now be, characterized by generosity and sharing, but in a season which for literally hundreds of thousands of Canadians will be characterized this year by bitterness, by deprivation and by a deep fear about their security and the ability of themselves and their children to find jobs and the rights which should be part of the birthright of people of a country as naturally fortunate as our own.

That problem, that bitter Christmas which faces the people of Canada now, does not arise because of any weakness in the country. We are one of the blessed countries of the world. It is exclusively because we have a government today which has not only failed for a decade to plan the kind of economic policies which could bring growth, comfort and security to the people of the country, but a government also led by a Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) who used to call himself compassionate; a government which is not prepared to do the smallest single thing to help low-income Canadians, to help the poor, and to help those Canadians who will be most damaged by the economic circumstances we face this Christmas.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent) talked about a crisis; the minister said that there is none. The hon. member for Oshawa is right. We are facing the worst economic crisis which Canada has seen since the 1930s. Earlier this afternoon the Minister of Finance refused to accept that word. I say to him that a starting point for him and his government must be to start being honest with the people of Canada. They should not depend upon advertising campaigns to try to change their minds. They should not try to fast-talk them out of the deprivation and the problems Canadians know they face. They should just start being honest. As difficult as it might be, they should start being honest with the people of the country because they are the people to whom the government is responsible.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The fact is, we have had virtually no economic growth in 1980 and the prospect for next year is for virtually no growth again. By the minister's own estimate, almost 1.5 million Canadians will be out of work next year. In November, living costs were rising at an annual rate of 11.2 per cent. That was before the latest round of energy price increases, and it was before a new surge in food costs which the Retail Council of Canada forecast will approach 15 per cent next year. We know that the bank rate is at its highest level in history today.

Economic Conditions

The Canadian dollar is worth barely 82 cents American, its lowest level in 47 years. Bankruptcies are up over 20 per cent from a year ago, as soaring credit costs cripple our small businessmen and individual Canadians. If that is not an economic crisis, then I would ask the Minister of Finance, when he finds his feet, to describe what to him constitutes an economic crisis. It might not seem like a crisis to him, but it seems very much like a crisis to hundreds of thousands of Canadians to whom he is responsible.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: The minister said that he is doing everything he can, that there is nothing more he can do, that it is all the fault of the Americans. That is the economic action plan of the Liberal government—complain to the United States. Well, the Minister of Finance is deceiving Canadians when he says there is nothing he can do. The problem is not that he cannot do things; the problem is that he will not take actions which are available to him right now that could help Canadians who are in need, Canadians who will be facing a deeply bitter Christmas because this Minister of Finance and this government just do not care about low-income Canadians.

One thing he could do would be to bring in a shelter allowance, as we suggested this afternoon. Another thing he could do would be to bring in an energy tax credit, as we suggested last year and incorporated in our budget. Another thing he could do would be to help Canadians faced with the burden of paying mortgages or property taxes. Another thing he could do would be to exempt from some of his taxes the heating fuels which Canadians have to pay. He says that if he does those things it would lead to a deeper deficit. I point out to the House and to the minister that last year our government brought in an energy tax credit; our government was proposing and had ready for passage mortgage and property tax credits; our government had exempted heating fuels, and we were still projecting a budgetary deficit which was some \$3 billion lower than the deficit this government is bringing in.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: What we are dealing with here is a question of choice. The government can spend its money on propaganda advertising, as it has, or it can spend its money to help low-income Canadians in need, as we did and as this government refuses to do.

It is a matter of choice between whether one wants to keep the people of Canada dependent upon high-cost Saudi oil, or whether one wants to follow realistic policies which will move us toward self-sufficiency but which will also include help to those low-income Canadians who will need help as prices inevitably increase.

To the degree that we are limited by world circumstances, how did that happen in a country like Canada? How did that happen to this degree in a country which once was strong enough to stand on its own economically, to set its own course, to not have to cry to the Americans to bail us out whenever there was a turn in economic fortunes? What is happening here tonight, what is happening to this country now, is that we