

Government Orders

Ottawa. Can't you do something to find me a job, because I haven't worked for months?"

I admit that we cannot do everything, we cannot do the impossible, but at least we could have done something. Could we not at least have had an infrastructure program that would help people in construction, for example, not to shovel air but to do work that already needed to be done, like repairs?

I take Perley Bridge in my riding as an example. It is certainly not a pretty sight. This bridge needs to be replaced. The sewers in our cities like Hamilton, Hawkesbury and Alexandria and our sidewalks are projects that need to be done. I think it is past time that we just have useless make-work projects, if there ever was a time for that. Should we not have invested in that infrastructure which our cities, towns, villages and country need and at the same time restore hope for those people who need it so much, those whom my colleague was just talking about?

Ms. Copps: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and that is what Canadians expected last week from the Minister of Finance's mini-budget.

They talked about spending a lot of money on starting infrastructure projects, an idea already supported by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Mayor Jean Doré in Montreal, Bob Morrow in Hamilton and a number of other mayors. The Leader of the Opposition said, in the House and elsewhere, that the right time to go ahead with this kind of project was when we were in the middle of a devastating recession, which has now been going on for 30 months. Funding for such projects should be released when times are difficult, when the need is there, not just when the economy is starting to recover.

When the Minister of Finance says the recession is a world-wide phenomenon, he is right. However, two years ago here in the House, the former Minister of Finance admitted that he had decided to create a recession in Canada in order to cool down an overheated economy in Toronto. That is what he said. Right in the middle of a world-wide recession, the former Minister of Finance decided to pursue a policy in this country which merely made a bad situation worse.

The government says this is a world-wide phenomenon and nothing can be done about it, but these are the

same people whose policy it was to keep interest rates and the dollar high—a dollar that was very high in relation to the American dollar. What a coincidence. This was just after it decided to sign the free trade agreement. It is clear that pursuing a high dollar and high interest rate policy at the very moment the government signed a free trade agreement with the United States merely brought things to a head, and this is exactly what made a bad situation for worse.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert D. Nault (Kenora—Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise to deal with the opposition motion. This motion is very timely because of the belief of Canadians, as reported in the media and by forays of different ministers of the government, that in essence where we are today is simply no fault of the government; in essence, what has happened is that the Conservative government's policy has to be the way it is because its hands are tied.

One issue we have to talk about in this place in a debate like this is solutions. We have to talk about ideas that we have as members of Parliament that will help our constituents and Canadians in general to feel that there is some hope and to understand that we in this place are dealing with issues that are of utmost importance in their minds.

What concerns me the most in this whole debate so far and in this last eight years of Tory rule is that they have continued to perpetuate the myth that the federal government's hands are tied. They say we have a deficit and therefore they cannot afford to help Canadians. The attitude is that market forces will lead the recovery and that we will get out of the recession if we leave it in the hands of the business community; that if we allow the U.S. to get back on its feet, it will lead the recovery and that, indeed, will usher in better times for Canadians.

The Canadian government and the Canadian people are in grave trouble. Let us look at the facts. Unemployment is at roughly 1.7 million people, welfare at 2.3 million Canadians. That is a total of roughly four million people. It is not easy to say in this House that there are four million Canadians who are not participating in the economy, not active contributors to the policies we would like to put forward in order to build the hopes and aspirations of Canadians.