

The Budget—Mr. Harney

• (2010)

I have another reason for congratulating the Minister of Finance. I do not know whether he really deserves it. At any rate, he seemed to go all out for a policy of budgetary expansion. What I am going to say may sound a little heretical, Mr. Speaker, but heretical things have been said before from this corner of the House. It has become very obvious to many students of the dismal science of economics that even the Keynesian approach to economics will not work any more.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harney: I was rather pleased, in a way, to see the people on my immediate right fall into the trap. Their immediate reaction, in effect, was to overturn all the sacred tablets which they had been carrying for many years and to call for a vastly more expansionary kind of budget because, I suppose, if they are the apostles of faith in growth they believe, as does the government, I think, that growth will solve all problems.

We really have to ask ourselves whether the nature of unemployment facing the people of Canada today is of the classical kind. I know there are certain sections of the country where there is massive and very evident unemployment, where the individuals who are thrown out of work feel, at the very least, a certain kind of fellowship in that they see themselves not to be alone. But for many citizens of this country, being unemployed is a lonely, solitary and alienating business because they see themselves as alone out of a job, keenly aware of a sense of uselessness in a society which seems to be busy and bustling all around them.

We really have to ask ourselves whether a purely expansionary budget, in the classical sense, will do anything to change this pattern. The point I am coming to is simply—since I have very little time I would like to dwell on it for my last two or three minutes—that I urge this House, and particularly the government, to take a totally new look at our economy. I urge all hon. members not to fall into the old trap of simply encouraging more growth, because growth by itself will not change the quality of life of Canadians. We must look for a different way of living our economic life in this country. I would urge on this House a policy which concentrates upon qualitative growth as opposed to quantitative growth. We must set out to improve the quality of life for the individual and the community rather than simply the quantity of goods.

There are figures that I could quote. We now know, for example, that 10 per cent of disposable income is saved by Canadians. That is a very high proportion. I do not mean to indicate by this that everybody in Canada has money to save, but there certainly are certain sectors of our population which have money to save. Any simplistic, classically-based expansionary approach to the problem of unemployment will simply give them more money to save, without giving to those people who have not enough money to live on, enough money with which to survive.

We must look at every impetus we put into the economy to see whether it changes the nature of our economic existence. I would urge on the Minister of Finance and on the government a totally new look at the world of work,

[Mr. Harney.]

because it is becoming very obvious to many people that simply to create jobs as a way of giving people remuneration so that they can buy the goods that we can produce—there is no question that we can produce the goods—will not get them out of the squirrel cage in which they find themselves.

Surely this parliament should be ready to invoke some new thinking rather than simply saying to the country, "Look, we can make the squirrel cage run faster and let those who have drop out, drop out." There are many attendant aspects to what I have said. I am sorry, although I am sure several members are not, that I cannot expand on this matter but I hope that I can on another occasion. Somebody has to stand here and say what a lot of people outside parliament are saying, simply that growth by itself does not change the nature of our existence, that by increasing the gross national product what we are doing in large measure is increasing the production of junk, not changing the quality of our production and the quality of people's lives. What people outside are saying is that the production of junk by a lot of people makes junk out of their lives.

Let us ask ourselves this question as we look at our economy: How many people are truly usefully employed? I end on a note which is not mine, Mr. Speaker. Unlike some other hon. members, I admit that I am plagiarizing. Here I quote from an article by a Mr. Anderson:

Generals are traditionally accused of wanting to re-fight the battles of their youth instead of meeting the weapons or tactics of a current war. The record of politicians (and of many economists) is infinitely worse. They cling tenaciously to techniques devised by their grandfathers to deal with circumstances that have long ceased to exist; and when (as happens sometimes, though not often) a new idea does emerge it is regarded as dangerously novel for at least a generation, and then misapplied.

The new idea that emerged a generation ago was the thinking of Lord Keynes. I am afraid that today it is in danger of being dangerously misapplied because we, the politicians, the representatives of the people of this land, cannot push ourselves into the post-industrial society and cannot begin to realize that the nature of the unemployment beast that faces us has changed radically. We must realize that we must look at the world of work and make sure that henceforward people who do the hard work of this nation are adequately remunerated for it; that there are still many people in this nation, some in this parliament and many in the professions, who are unemployed effectively in terms of real usefulness but nevertheless are extremely well paid. We have to look at the kind of work that is done by the people of Canada. In many cases it is soul-destroying work. In many cases the work we force them to do for remuneration is totally—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allotted to him by the order made last Thursday has expired.

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs I would like to draw attention to those features of the budget which are of interest to consumers. This budget is important to consumers. It has a number of provisions which were designed to be of direct benefit to them. The proposed reductions in sales taxes, excise taxes