

Government Orders

ment has lost or is close to losing effective control of the public purse”.

• (1650)

The deficit in 1976 was \$6 billion. The debt was just \$37 billion but it was not considered normal at the time. The situation was regarded as nearly out of control.

Consider for a moment the Lambert commission, a royal commission on financial management that reported in 1979. The commissioners noted that our debt to GNP ratio was twice the figure of the U.S. government, and what was the deficit in Canada in 1979? It was just \$13 billion. The debt was only \$61 billion, a pittance today. The government was so alarmed that it appointed a royal commission to investigate it.

The words that this government speaks merely echo those that have been spoken over the last two decades of deficits, seeking to cast the deficit and debt in the light of normality, trying to save face, attempting to lull the electorate into believing that our situation is somehow acceptable.

Little by little, year by year we spin neat phrases and explain it with eloquent phrases and words and clever accounting tricks that merely hide the deadly truth a little longer. We are like frogs swimming in a pot of hot water. We do not know that we are going to be the supper until the water is boiling. It may be too late if this bill and this budget are passed by this House of Commons.

Governments often, for example, pull out their shabby comparison between debt to GNP ratio with our ratio just after World War II, saying that our situation was the same then, do not worry. They do not mention that the entire world was different. The baby boom was beginning. The U.S. was the unchallenged economic world leader with a burgeoning economy and an insatiable demand for our natural resources.

There was no global competition, no necessity for intensively trained workers as there is today. Our position today is uniquely perilous. A child could see it, but this House continues to hide its eyes.

In February this government brought in a budget and acted in precisely the same way as its old political enemy, the Conservatives, who took no real action against the deficit, and demonstrated that they had no will to change the status quo. What are the consequences of maintaining the status quo?

A few weeks ago I attended a seminar with the senior economist of Burns Fry Limited. After comparing our economy with the state of other world economies, he stated that he believes we may well have come to the point of no return. There is no way we will ever be able to pay our debt back. Our economy will become permanently hampered by our debt and

we will become progressively poorer as a nation. That is the result of maintaining the status quo.

When we see the size of the debt and the size of the deficit, governments past and present should hang their heads in shame. It is a debt of \$20,000 for every man, woman and child in Canada. The plan is to add another \$100 billion to that debt. This is a virtual guarantee that future budgets will be able to offer Canadians even less in the way of essential services, even less in the way of job creation, less tax relief and even less of a future.

In the 10 minutes it takes for me to finish this short presentation we will have piled another four million dollars on our national debt.

How could we have come to this? I believe we are all sincere and reasonably intelligent men and women. Could it be a systemic problem, a deep rooted problem with our political process that in some cases derails the public interest?

I believe our problem is systemic. It is a difficult, pernicious problem that threatens to engulf this nation in a sea of debt. The problem is the strict discipline that political parties impose on their own members. It is a shame, really, especially since political parties were originally formed in response to the public demand for good government, government that would not cater to special interests or be bought with the taxpayers' own money.

Party affiliation has allowed Canada to have stable government, but in recent years it has also led to governments whose agendas have been set by a select few people at the top. Something has gone wrong. Voters have come to the conclusion that strict party discipline has paralysed Parliament, making a mockery of true democratic principles. Members are not free to vote for what they know is right. They have to vote for what their leaders tell them is right.

Today we are considering a historic bill, an infamous bill. It may be the bill that renders our fiscal situation truly impossible. We are grinding our economy into mincemeat and offering little to hundreds of thousands of desperate and frustrated workers.

I know that many members opposite and those watching on television disagree with the course of this government and I want to speak directly to them today.

• (1655)

Listen to the stinging indictment of the *Globe and Mail* editorial from last week: “This generation of Canadians in this Parliament is imposing a lower standard of living on the next generation through sustained, profligate borrowing. The national government is turning into a large and feeble creature, sapped of the power to take initiatives, presenting a caricature of leadership. This budget makes a mockery of Jean Chrétien’s promise of a return to the good old days. In the good old days the