

The minister today may defend his budget by saying that this is a time for hard decisions and a time to be tough enough to stick by those decisions. Everyone across the country accepts the need to make tough decisions in our present economic circumstances. The issue about this budget is not whether the government is tough. The issue here is whether the government knows what it is doing, and the issue in this debate is whether, in the face of overwhelming evidence that this budget does not do what the government pretends it does, the government will have the courage to pull the budget back or whether it will push this budget through, whatever the damage, whatever the costs to individual Canadians and whatever the costs to the integrity and the strength of this country.

If I may say so, for individual Members of Parliament on the government side, many of whom have been heard over the last several weeks expressing their views and the views of their constituents on this budget, members who were sent here in a party's name but with a deeper responsibility to a nation and to its people, the issue, if the minister ignores the facts that we all know and inflicts this terrible harm on millions of Canadians, is whether the Liberal Members of Parliament will put their country's interests first or slink subserviently into obeying their political masters.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Clark:** As you know, Mr. Speaker, when the government failed to show the slightest interest in how the budget was affecting Canadians in their daily life, my party's caucus set up a committee to seek the opinion of the Canadian people. During the last three weeks, 62 members of our caucus held hearings in 15 communities across Canada. One hundred and sixty-eight people were heard by our committee and gave their views on the budget and the economy. These people represented Canadians from all walks of life, including pensioners and Indian bands, professional associations and consumer groups, business and labour. All were unanimous in their opposition to the budget. Everywhere the same message was heard: The budget must be withdrawn before Canada goes under! When the caucus committee's report is made public, the members of this House will realize how great the opposition to the budget actually is. They will understand the frustration of small businessmen upon realizing that the government has completely changed the rules of the game. They will hear the anger of pensioners who see their insurance plan is being taxed before they even get the money to which they are entitled. They will realize that the Canadian people are deeply disappointed in this government which no longer deserves their confidence.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, all of us in this House know the dismal statistics about Canada's economy. From August to December last year 235,000 Canadians lost their jobs across Canada, and in a presentation to our committee the Canadian Manufacturers' Association gave its estimate that another 100,000 jobs will be lost in the manufacturing sector in the next few months

### *Supply*

alone, a crisis aggravated by this lay-off budget of the Liberal government. A record 8,055 Canadian businesses were forced to declare bankruptcy in 1981. Farm bankruptcies were 18 per cent higher in 1981 than they were in 1980, and they were 109 per cent higher last year than they were in 1979.

Canada Mortgage and Housing estimates that as many as 40,000 Canadian families may lose their homes because of high interest rates. Indeed, the prospects are that this situation will get worse. The November Conference Board forecast was as follows:

Next year holds a bleak prospect for the Canadian economy and for households in particular... continuing double-digit inflation, interest rates, increasing unemployment, declining business investment and the weakness in the United States all combine to rule out the possibility of a quick turnaround in the pace of economic activity.

As dismal a story as those statistics tell of a government wantonly squandering the potential of one of the richest nations in the world, those figures do not begin to describe the individual hardship and despair of countless Canadians. Many of those people came to our committee because they had despaired of the government's listening, but they hoped Members of Parliament might carry their case and their concern there to the floor of the people's Parliament.

The gross numbers on housing shortages and the cost of housing just cannot describe the fear, for example, of many young couples that the working wife may become pregnant, because if she does, they will have to give up the home they worked so hard to buy since one salary will not be able to support that home.

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The gross numbers on lay-offs cannot describe the fear of the plant worker in Ontario, in Quebec or anywhere across the country who is out of a job now after more than 20 years and has nowhere to turn. It cannot describe the fear of those people who wonder if their number is among the 100,000 other jobs that the Canadian Manufacturers' Association expects to be lost in the Canadian manufacturing sector. The gross numbers on inflation and interest rates cannot describe the despair that, according to testimony received in Nepean, has doubled calls to the suicide prevention centre in Ottawa.

These are but a few of the examples given to our budget committee across the country. I know that such stories are not limited to members on this side of the House. The tragedy of this budget is that its author either did not know or, worse, did not care about the impact on hardworking Canadians who are simply trying to hold on to their houses, to hold on to their jobs, to hold on to their small businesses or farms and to pass something better along to their children.

It is clear that this budget was prepared on false premises and introduced under false pretences. It was written in September, before we felt the full force of the recession that is now gripping Canada. The budget was written for conditions that had passed before it was presented. On those grounds alone the government should introduce a new budget which would respond to the current reality in Canada.