

*The Budget—Mr. Epp*

The hon. member for Don Valley East (Mr. Smith) is a good apologist for the government. He has a role to play. I accept that. However, for the first time from his mouth today and for the first time last night from the mouth of the Minister of Finance was there even a slight concession that Canada is in a recession.

Some Canadians may go further. Because of the lack of a job, loss of business or loss of opportunity, some Canadians are facing a personal depression. That is a strong word. However, all one has to do is to look today at the reaction of ordinary Canadians to the budget of yesterday to see that that is true.

Throughout the speech of the hon. member for Don Valley East or the budget that was presented last night, the reasons for the trouble in Canada were not laid at the doorstep of this government. What are the reasons? Their first reason was the United States and the policies in that country. When times were good, how many times did we hear members opposite railing against our neighbour to the south? Now, because the shoe is on the other foot, they use the argument that once the United States recovers, things will be better in Canada. They say there is a world recession. For example, base metal prices are low. When one looks at our mining industry and international markets, one sees that that is a fact.

A former minister of finance, in defending the performance of the Liberal government of that day, had the gall to say that the anchovy crop off the coast of Peru was causing difficulties in our economy. At no time do they say that largely because of government promises, government action or government decisions problems are created here in Canada by this government on the floor of this House. They will not accept that responsibility. They like to accept the perks of government, the power that comes with government, but how often do we see them taking the responsibility that comes with government?

The question for us tonight, is do you, can you, should you believe the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the Minister of Finance? We have all heard the Prime Minister say that he was going to wrestle inflation to the ground. Unfortunately, many Canadians believed him. As of yesterday's budget, we are once again to believe that despite the National Energy Program, the November 12 budget and the changes of December 18, if we follow this drummer, we will move out of the recession, have a maximum 6 per cent inflation and good times will be back in Canada.

The government must face the reality of the little boy who cried wolf once too often. Today we have a crisis of confidence. The resources are still there and the potential is still there, but today people do not have confidence in their government. But today people do not have confidence in their government. They do not believe you, gentlemen and ladies, they do not believe you any more. They have heard that once too often.

• (2120)

While it may be tragic for you in an electoral sense—and only time will tell that—that is not the important issue today. The important issue is that because of this government's leadership Canadians today are unemployed. Because of its

leadership Canadians are losing their homes. Because of its leadership people are losing their businesses. Because of its leadership people with 30 and 35 years of experience, who are 50 and 55 years of age and were hoping that in another five or ten years of employment they could take retirement, now, suddenly, ten years early, find themselves out of work. They go on the labour market and they say, "Can you give me a job?", and they are told they are too old.

That is the government's legacy, and no matter what rhetoric they use, no matter what they say, that remains, and Canadians will not forget it.

I was not here last night, Mr. Speaker, but I would have liked to have been here. I had given a commitment to a small community in my riding. I spoke at a high school graduation, a small graduation, there were 19 grade 12 graduates. That is not large by most high school standards anymore. At the banquet, I asked a number of those graduates, "What is your plan now that you are stepping forth, so to speak, into the adult world?" And what they said invariably was, "Give us a chance, give us work, show us the opportunities and we will go and get it and we will build this country." The spirit that developed this country is there with our young people. The tragedy of this government's economic leadership today is that young people who are looking for work cannot find it. At what stage do they say that the opportunities they hear us speaking about, the opportunities that they innately and inherently feel are in Canada, they cannot realize? What happens to those young people, in terms of their attitude to the country, to the institutions of the country—and yes, Mr. Speaker, in terms of their attitude to this institution and the democratic process? Those are serious words but I mean them tonight. It is a question all members, but especially the government members opposite, should answer.

We hear as well now that we can lick inflation, that we can beat inflation if we lower our expectations. Lower our expectations! Just think of that statement for a bit, Mr. Speaker. We are telling Canadians to lower their expectations—for Canada! Do you believe that in the period of John A. Macdonald, Cartier and Brown, they told Canadians that lowering their expectations would build the country? Do you think that Laurier and Sifton told people who were immigrants without anything, immigrants who came to western Canada and all they had was 160 acres, to till their soil, grow their own food, build their own homes, build the barn, did they tell them to lower their expectations? Surely this country has gone away beyond the vision of those people. Today we hear the government say, "Lower your expectations, and things will be better."

No, it should be the other way, Mr. Speaker. They should be able as a government to say: "Canadians, young people, middle aged, older people, this country is great, here are the opportunities, here is the climate, go out and get it." Surely that should be the policy.

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