

Supply

Canadians know that bankruptcies have increased phenomenally in the last year, that the results of the Canada-U.S. trade deal have not proven to increase jobs for Canadians, but to decrease them. You cannot separate that, Mr. Speaker. You cannot separate the policies of this government in the monetary fiscal area, in the economic policies for the feelings of anger about what their country is now able to offer them and what kind of future there will be for their children.

When they see post-secondary education significantly cut back, not just by this government, but by former governments as well, what future is there for young people? What future is there for this country as we cut back research and development to make us less competitive? In fact, this government's policies are doing the very things which make us less competitive and less prosperous.

Those unemployed Canadians, those young children who are living in poverty in increasing numbers in this country, who are standing in the lines of food banks, the increasing number of homeless, has as much to do with national unity as does any constitutional amendment. It is absolutely essential that all of us on all sides of the House recognize that without security in the economy, without policies that will lead to full employment, without real policies to protect the environment, without real commitment to social programs in this country, constitutional amendments will mean nothing.

Mr. David Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the leader of the New Democratic Party. I listened with great interest to what she said. I would ask her though looking at her motion if really she is not calling for a constitutional convention or constituent assembly. I know she spoke about it in her comments, but why not call for that specifically rather than call for so many of the ingredients of one without saying explicitly she thinks that is the way to involve Canadians.

I certainly agree with her it is the only way that we can involve Canadians in redoing the Constitution of Canada. She did point out, I think I am quoting her correctly, that it has worked with some success, I think was her phrase. My understanding is that it has worked very well in many countries and it has been a success virtually everywhere it has been tried.

Why does she not make the call for a constituent assembly the substance of her motion rather than saying everything in it but that?

Ms. McLaughlin: Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague's comments about that, because in fact I did address that in my speech today, as I have done previously in the House, and called on the government and others to examine that issue.

The member from Edmonton is quite correct, that the constitutional assembly has worked well in a number of countries. I cite Australia particularly. It is a country that has some similarity of issues to Canada. It was a process that I think worked quite well there.

Why we have chosen today to set out the principles and the process is that we do not want to pre-judge what the best would be. We would like to hear everyone else's ideas but I think the one important principle on which we can all agree, and the member from Edmonton obviously agrees with as well, is that the old process does not work. The old ways do not work. We cannot have 11 men just sitting at a different table this time in a different place. We need to open it up to people from the west, the north, the Atlantic region, from central Canada, to those groups that have particular interests, such as aboriginal people, the multicultural community and women.

• (1220)

We have to make sure that those groups are involved. If we do not do that, we as politicians in this House have dramatically failed the Canadian people. I, for one—and I am sure the member from Edmonton was making the same kind of comment—do not want to be a part of that kind of failure again. Therefore, I would very strongly urge that all parties consider the specific process, whether it is a convention or a constituent assembly. I myself, because I have presented that in the House before, favour that model. There may be better models that I have not thought of. I do not pretend to have all the best ideas, but I think I have some good ones, and the one that is most important is that all Canadians have to be served by this process. All Canadians have to be reflected in this process, and I think we should just get on with it and start doing that. Then we would see some real movement and, hopefully, a sense of hope about the future of this country, because that, of all things, is what Canadians need today.