

I have had the opportunity of becoming closely acquainted with my constituency over the past year. Anyone who has been through an election campaign knows how well you get to know your area. We said to the people, as did many members elected in the recent by-elections, "Send a message to Ottawa". I do not know what message came from the Conservative party. I do not know their intentions.

Speaking for the people of Broadview, the message that comes from the working people in that part of Toronto is that they do not want to see a reduction in government spending. They do not want cutbacks in public and social services. They want a government that is compassionate, one that is prepared to be generous to its people, willing to plan for the future of this country rather than leave the economy to foreign investors and large private interests in this country.

There are three options for the future of our economy. One is to continue on the present path of the Liberal government. Of all the options, that is the least comprehensible. It is very difficult to know precisely on what they are running, what are their intentions and what is their program. The lack of information in this bill is one more example of that. They are leaderless in their economic policies. They are rudderless. They have no sense of direction. They are incapable of listening to the people when they speak.

Nothing has made this more clear than the fact that there were 15 by-elections held, not one. It was not people in one or two constituencies in this country that voted; it was over one million Canadians voicing their dissatisfaction with the economic and social policies of this government. However, there has not been one iota of an indication that this government intends to change its course in any way. That kind of arrogance has become the hallmark of this Liberal government, and it is certain to be the cause of its inevitable downfall.

The second option is the one proposed by my Conservative friends to the right. It is a very familiar option, that of private gain and public squalor. It is an option of reducing the role of government, the level of services and the standard of living for the people of this country.

Yesterday I obtained from Statistics Canada the figures on income distribution for the year 1977. Those who talk about Canada being an affluent society are entitled to know these figures. These figures indicate that in terms of purchasing power, the average income of the Canadian family decreased by about 5 per cent in 1977. An additional 66,000 families fell below the poverty line in 1977 over 1976.

That is the record of this government. That is the implication of cutbacks in unemployment insurance. It directly affects the level of income of tens of thousands of Canadians. When you reduce the level of spending for joint programs with the provinces by \$220 million, it is the working people whose incomes and standard of living are affected. It does not affect those who are able to get what they want on the market, those who are able to provide for themselves. When you cut back on education, it does not affect those who attend private schools and intend to continue doing so. It affects those who rely on public spending for their benefits and future.

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We say to the Conservative party that their program, with all of its implications, including this most recent mortgage scheme, will clearly mean that those who are able to provide and indeed make gain for themselves will be able to do so, but those who are not will not. That is the message. It is a message of meanness and of self-enrichment. It is not a message worthy of being taken to the Canadian people.

In the bad old days, the British Tories said to the people that they needed to have property before they could vote. There has now been a change. The Canadian Tories are saying to the people, that they need to have property before they can have an income tax benefit. This is just as unfair and discriminatory as the disenfranchisement of people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is an economic equivalent of that disenfranchisement and the Canadian people are entitled to know that.

A speech made by the Leader of the Opposition a couple of months ago was reported in the Canadian press. He is quoted to have said that we should take the American tax system as our model in Canada. Does the Leader of the Opposition want us to have the same municipal services as they have in Cleveland, the same system of urban transportation as they have in Houston or the same system of medical care as they have in New York? Is this the model being put forward to the Canadian people? You cannot have lower taxes—and whether they are lower or not in the United States is debatable—and more services. If you have lower taxes, you have less services. If we are going to be giving less services, let us have the shopping list before the election.

• (1612)

I have spoken this afternoon about the programs of the Liberal party, which are pretty difficult to discern at the moment, and the programs of the Conservative party, which are becoming clearer and clearer as time goes on. I want to close my remarks by putting forward a third option which, I am proud to say, my party and my leader have been putting forward in this House and in the country for the past year. Some of the philosophical background to this option was provided in the very interesting remarks of my colleague, the hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge (Mr. Saltsman), who spoke earlier in this debate.

Society is changing far more rapidly than we are prepared or willing to recognize. We can no longer talk seriously about government withdrawal from certain critical sectors of the economy because that would be politically and socially inequitable. If the government wants to withdraw from particular sectors of the economy, and if the government wants to sell off Petro-Canada and give all of the oil business back to those who are making tremendous profits at the expense of the people of Canada, the government can go ahead; but let us have no doubts as to what effect that would have on ordinary Canadians. Let us have no doubts about the political effect that would have on the sovereignty of this country.

We must recognize that in many ways Canada is an underdeveloped economy, yet we are not developing economic, social