

Adjournment Debate

of the failing economy and the known reduction in revenues generated, it was anticipated that the deficit would increase and increase substantially.

The uncertainty as to the quantum of that increase, however, has led in my view to a serious undermining of the value of our currency. That decline has been rectified in part by the traditional practice followed by this government of shoring up the value of our dollar by increasing interest rates in Canada using the agency of the Bank of Canada. The increase in interest rates has triggered a negative response to the government's alleged attack on inflation, the declared enemy. At the same time it has forced more businesses out of business and it has exacerbated the amount of unemployment suffered in the country. Currently we have at least 1.5 million working Canadians who are no longer working as a result of this foolhardy policy adopted by the current government.

It seems appropriate, in the event the decline of our dollar with all of the consequential effects to which I have made reference is to be stemmed, for the government to disclose a new set of financial figures indicating exactly the nature of the deficit that we may anticipate for the current year.

The government's response to this significant issue has been to lay blame for our economic plight upon the government of the United States. I pause to ask if, indeed, our entire financial position as a nation is to be determined by actions of another government, why do we need a Minister of Finance? Why do we need a Department of Finance and why do we need a Minister of State for Finance if all they can do is come into this House and explain to the people of Canada that we must await some measure of improvement to come from a foreign country.

If I had any doubt as to the need for the Minister of State for Finance, that doubt was rather rapidly resolved by his response to my second question. I asked, in light of current economic circumstances in this country, whether it would not be appropriate, having regard to our massive foreign aid program which currently in terms of direct funding exceeds \$1.724 billion, to refer the issue of the quantum of foreign aid to the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence for examination. The minister's response to me was as follows:

Madam Speaker, perhaps the hon. member could stop staring at his navel—

I asked that question in all seriousness.

● (2205)

I am not familiar with the constituency represented by the Minister of State for Finance, but I can tell the House that somewhere within his constituency there are some of those businesses which have gone bankrupt that are represented by the 39 per cent increase in insolvencies in the country in the first quarter of this year over last year. Somewhere in his constituency there are farmers who have become insolvent and are represented by the 70 per cent increase in farm bankruptcies. Somewhere in his constituency there are some of those unemployed persons who are now forming an army.

Canadians are angry, and I am angry, with the flippant, arrogant response which the minister presented to me and to the House. Surely it is time that the government came to recognize that the people of Canada will no longer accept this kind of abuse. The government must begin to have some regard for the welfare of the people of Canada and adopt policies—if not this one, then surely some other—which will bring some relief to hard-pressed citizens of Canada.

Mr. Douglas Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, last week I had an opportunity to visit the Caribbean Development Bank, an institution which serves the small islands running through the Caribbean Commonwealth area, the areas we think of whenever we think about a Caribbean vacation in the middle of the winter. All through that area, Canada has contributed magnificently in very practical ways to schools, fishery projects, forestry projects, airports and in a myriad of practical ways which enormously help the people in those countries. We are proud of our contributions in that area. I saw them with my own eyes. I saw how those projects improved the standard of living of those people. But I also saw, which the hon. member for York North (Mr. Gamble) will never admit, how those projects improved Canada's reputation abroad, improved our trade and how, in turn, they improved the ability of the people in those areas to rely on their own capacity and their own strength. We can be proud of those kinds of contributions. Those are the ideals which many of us who look higher than our navel will find are possible in the world.

The hon. member for York North plays on the opposite. He plays on the stingy and mean-mindedness in all of us. He tries to drag us down to a small ideal. He implies that we are all suffering some kind of enormous economic damage because of an act of generosity to other people around the world. His comments tonight carry these ideals to an extreme. He is telling us that building schools, airport hangars and forestry projects are leading to business and farm bankruptcies. The hon. member claims to be a practical man. He should in fact try that claim out on a few of his constituents, where he would be laughed out of the hall.

Let me give one simple example. Canada has said that it will increase its official development assistance to other countries to 0.5 per cent of our gross national product, hardly an extreme case, hardly an excess which will lead to suffering or damage in the economy. Instead, it is a universally recognized, humanitarian level which also helps our businesses, our self-reliance and our trade patterns around the world. We benefit as much as the people who receive this money.

As a final note, I will tell the House that when I listened to the people at the Caribbean Development Bank talking about the money we were using in that bank, they talked about good management, good project evaluation, increased purchases from Canada, streamlined loan administration and constant management review, ideals which I support.